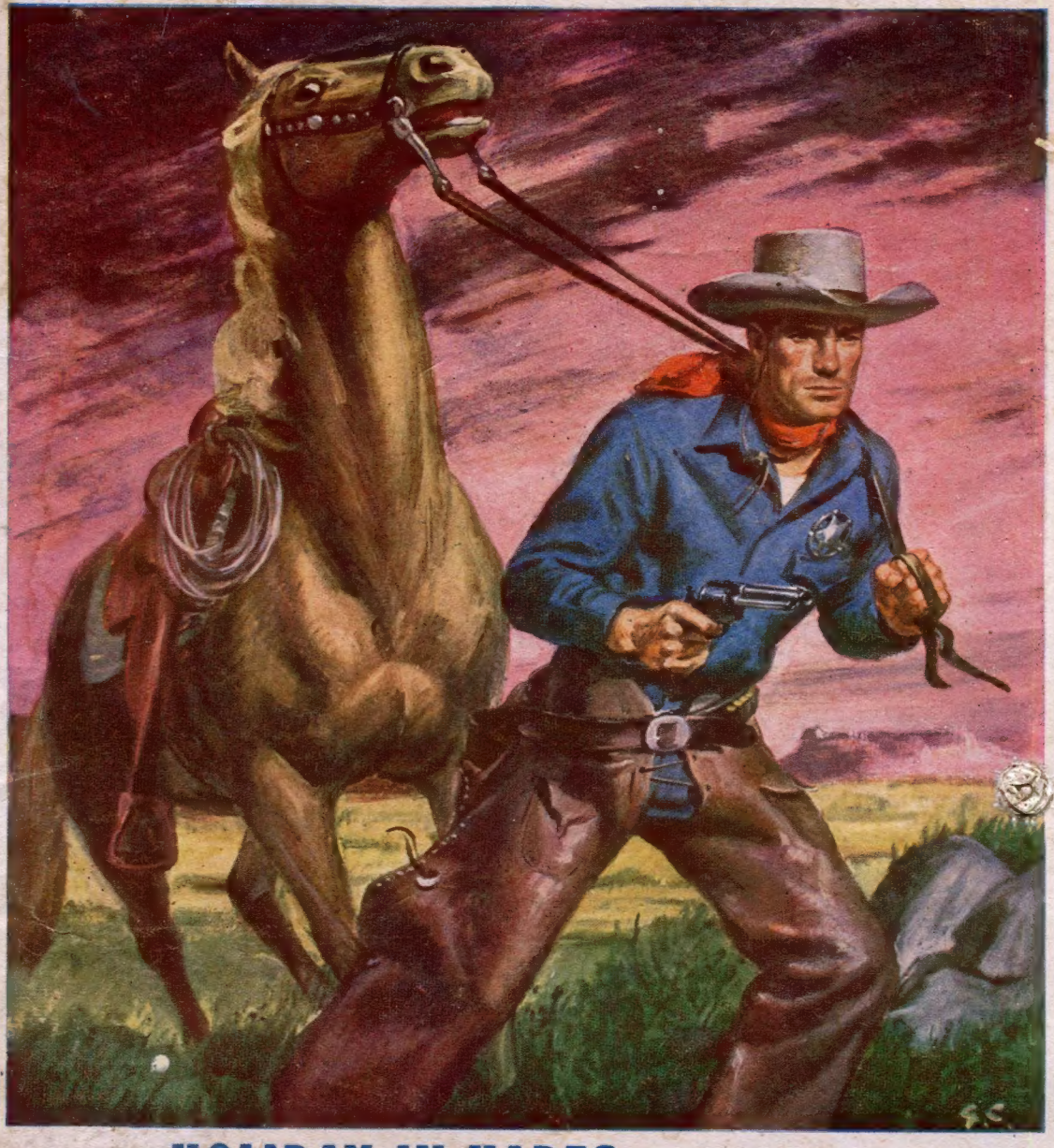
NEW, COMPLETE STORIES NEVER BEFORE PUBLISHED

NOV. 25¢

TEXAS RANGERS

A THRILLING PUBLICATION



FEATURING: **HOLIDAY IN HADES**

A JIM HATFIELD ACTION NOVEL BY **JACKSON COLE**

25¢ • BEST ACTION WESTERN STORIES • TEXAS RANGERS • NOV. 1951

$100.00 A WEEK in CASH
PAID DIRECT TO YOU

FAMILY HOSPITAL PLAN

SAVE MONEY!
There's a big advantage to buying this policy by mail. This method of selling is less costly for us—and that's another reason why we are able to offer so much protection for so little money.

Policy Pays for a Day, a Week, a Month, a Year—*just as long as necessary for you to be hospitalized!*

JUST LOOK
The Large Benefit This Low Cost Policy Provides!

The Service Life Family Hospital Plan covers you and your family for about everything—for *every* accident, and for *all* common and rare diseases after the policy has been in force 30 days or more. Very serious disease such as cancer, tuberculosis, heart disease, diseases involving female organs, sickness resulting in a surgical operation, hernia, lumbago and sacroiliac conditions originating after the policy is in force six months are all covered . . . Hospitalization caused by attempted suicide, use of intoxicants or narcotics, insanity, and venereal disease is naturally excluded.

The money is all yours—for any purpose you want to use it. There are no hidden meanings or big words in the policy. We urge you and every family and also individuals to send for this policy on our 10 day free trial offer—and be convinced that no other hospital plan offers you so much for your $1.00 a month!

TWO SPECIAL FEATURES

MATERNITY
Benefits At Small Extra Cost
Women who will some day have babies will want to take advantage of a special low cost maternity rider. Pays $50.00 for childbirth confinement either in the hospital or at home, after policy has been in force 10 months. Double the amount on twins.

POLIO
Benefits At No Extra Cost
In lieu of other regular benefits policy pays these benefits if polio strikes—
For Hospital Bills, up to $500.00
For Doctor's Bills while in the hospital, up to $500.00
For Orthopedic Appliances, up to $500.00
TOTAL OF $1,500.00

3c A DAY IS ALL YOU PAY
for this outstanding new Family Protection

Wonderful news! This new policy covers everyone from infancy to age 70! When sickness or accident sends you or a member of your family to the hospital—this policy PAYS $100.00 PER WEEK for a day, a month, even a year . . . or just as long as you stay in the hospital. What a wonderful feeling to know your savings are protected and you won't have to go into debt. The money is paid DIRECT TO YOU to spend as you wish. This remarkable new Family Hospital Protection costs only 3c a day for each adult 18 to 59 years of age, and for age 60 to 70 only 4½c a day. This policy even covers children up to 18 years of age with cash benefits of $50.00 a week while in the hospital—yet the cost is only 1½c a day for each child! Benefits paid while confined to any recognized hospital, except government hospitals, rest homes and clinics, spas or sanitariums. Pick your own doctor. Naturally this wonderful policy is issued only to individuals and families now in good health; otherwise the cost would be sky high. But once protected, you are covered for about every sickness or accident. Persons covered may return as often as necessary to the hospital within the year.

This is What $100.00 a Week Can Mean to You When in the Hospital for Sickness or Accident

Money melts away fast when you or a member of your family has to go to the hospital. You have to pay costly hospital board and room . . . doctor's bills and maybe the surgeon's bill too . . . necessary medicines, operating room fees—a thousand and one things you don't count on. What a Godsend this READY CASH BENEFIT WILL BE TO YOU. Here's cash to go a long way toward paying heavy hospital expenses—and the money left over can help pay you for time lost from your job or business. Remember—all cash benefits are paid directly to you.

Examine This Policy Without Cost or Obligation—Read It—Talk It Over—Then Decide

10 DAYS FREE EXAMINATION

You are invited to inspect this new kind of Family Hospital Plan. We will send the actual policy to you for ten days at no cost or obligation. Talk it over with your banker, doctor, lawyer or spiritual adviser. Then make up your mind. This policy backed by the full resources of the nationally known Service Life Insurance Company of Omaha, Nebraska—organized under the laws of Nebraska and with policyholders in every state. SEND NO MONEY—just your name and address! No obligation, of course!

REMEMBER—$100.00 A WEEK CASH BENEFIT IS ACTUALLY $14.25 PER DAY!

FREE INSPECTION . . . MAIL COUPON
The Actual Policy Will Come to You at Once Without Cost or Obligation

The Service Life Insurance Company
Hospital Department J-17, Omaha 2, Nebraska
Please rush the new Family Hospital Protection Plan Policy to me on 10 days Free Inspection. I understand that I am under no obligation.

Name.....

Address.....

City or Town.....*State*.....

THE SERVICE LIFE FAMILY HOSPITAL PLAN

SERVICE LIFE INSURANCE COMPANY
Assets of $13,188,604.16 as of January 1, 1951
Hospital Department J-17, Omaha 2, Nebraska

CRACK DOWN ON MONEY WORRIES!

You can have more money for things you need—a better job—bigger responsibility—congratulations and praise—by letting I. C. S. train you to succeed instead of standing still

Higher prices! Higher costs! Bigger taxes! You feel them too—because they leave LESS for necessities, LITTLE for luxuries! But YOU can have money for shoes, food, clothing, pleasure. Business and industry are still looking for men and women who can qualify for higher jobs. Not tomorrow, not the next day, but TODAY. With the right training you can name your own price. Why stay where you are?

TRAIN—TO GET THERE I. C. S. will show you how to develop the skills and hidden talents within you, how to bring out your personality and self-force, all a part of you. Let these assets go to work for you—right away!

Study at home, what a relief!

No need to go out and sit and listen. Study WHEN you want and WHERE you want. Any time—no set hours. Do it when you feel like it—and get MORE out of I. C. S. training!

THERE'S NO TRAINING LIKE I.C.S. TRAINING!

Biggest builder of successes on earth! 61st year—5,918,632 students to date. I. C. S. gives you the practical plus the bedrock facts and theory. No skimming or skimping!

LOOK WHAT OTHERS SAY

Typical of thousands of letters from students

"Thanks to I. C. S. training, my salary has been increased 204%!" N. E., Bellingham, Wash.

"Mention of my I. C. S. course alone opened a new position for me!" A. R. P., South Gate, Calif.

"I got a break over more experienced fellows because of my I. C. S. training." M. D., Suncook, N. H.

"The I. C. S. course marked a milestone in my career." J. R., Philadelphia, Pa.

I. C. S. offers you 391 courses to choose from—in any and every field. Every course trains you for a bigger job and higher pay.

BIGGER JOB, HIGHER PAY, HAPPIER FAMILY

All this comes from qualifying yourself for the job above. It takes training and skill. And the only place you can get them is out of yourself. Do something to make training and skill your allies.

WOMEN—here's your chance

I. C. S. offers women many courses to qualify for better jobs, bigger responsibility, more pay, a brighter future.

GOING INTO ARMY-NAVY?

Don't get in a rut. Qualify for bigger rating, higher pay. Start training today—be ready when the time comes.

Get started on the road to success. That means—send this coupon—it brings important information. Also free book "How to Succeed."

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS ICS

Box 3967-Y, SCRANTON 9, PA.

☐ Please send me free 36-page book, "How to Succeed."
Please rush me free booklet on career subject checked:

☐ Accounting & Mgmt.	☐ Commercial Art	☐ High School
☐ Automobiles	☐ Drafting	☐ Mechanical Engineering
☐ Chemical Engineering	☐ Electrical Engineering	☐ Television & Radio

Name _____ Age _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____

Employed by _____ Position _____

Special tuition rates to members of the Armed Forces. Canadian residents send coupon to International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Ltd., Montreal, Canada.

EVERY STORY IN THIS ISSUE BRAND NEW

TEXAS RANGERS

A THRILLING PUBLICATION

Vol. 48, No. 3 NOVEMBER, 1952

A Complete Jim Hatfield Novel

HOLIDAY IN HADES.....Jackson Cole 10
Some laughed at the rumor of a rebel Mexican army making a play to regain Texas—but the Lone Wolf knew that it was no laughing matter

Two Novelets

RIMROCK REVENGE.....Roe Richmond 60
If this beautiful girl was actually the killer she seemed to be, was Gardell marked for death?
SMOKE OF CRAZY THUNDER.....Lauran Paine 92
Caleb Doorn fought the Arapaho at every turn, but there was one among them he couldn't fight

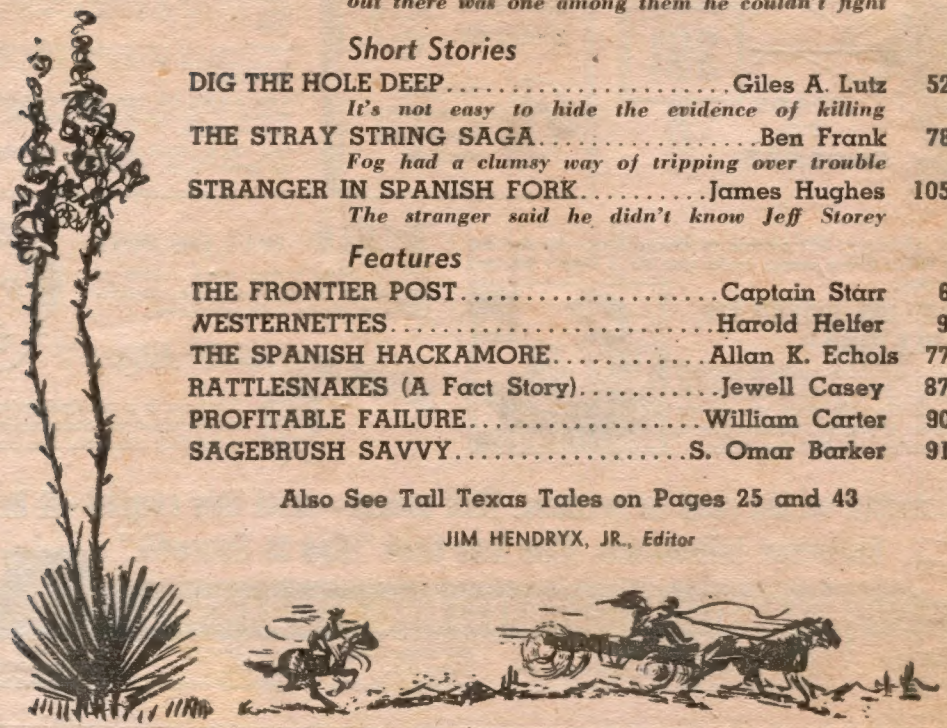
Short Stories

DIG THE HOLE DEEP.....Giles A. Lutz 52
It's not easy to hide the evidence of killing
THE STRAY STRING SAGA.....Ben Frank 78
Fog had a clumsy way of tripping over trouble
STRANGER IN SPANISH FORK.....James Hughes 105
The stranger said he didn't know Jeff Storey

Features

THE FRONTIER POST.....Captain Starr 6
WESTERNETTES.....Harold Helfer 9
THE SPANISH HACKAMORE.....Allan K. Echols 77
RATTLESNAKES (A Fact Story).....Jewell Casey 87
PROFITABLE FAILURE.....William Carter 90
SAGEBRUSH SAVVY.....S. Omar Barker 91

Also See Tall Texas Tales on Pages 25 and 43

JIM HENDRYX, JR., *Editor*

TEXAS RANGERS. Published monthly by Better Publications, Inc., at 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y. N. L. Pines, President. Subscription yearly $3.00, single copies 25c. Foreign and Canadian postage extra. Re-entered as second-class matter April 9, 1946, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879. Copyright, 1952 by Better Publications, Inc. Manuscripts will not be returned unless accompanied by self-addressed, stamped envelopes, and are submitted at the author's risk. Names of all characters used in stories and semi-fiction articles are fictitious. If the name of any real person or existing institution is used, it is a coincidence. In corresponding with this publication, please include your postal zone number, if any. November, 1952. issue.

PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.

All the thrills of the West . . . corralled into one exciting magazine . . .

Subscribe now to Ranch Romances

16 issues only $3

Everyone who enjoys hard-hitting stories of the Old West will find a paylode of thrills in each exciting issue of RANCH ROMANCES.

Every page of RANCH ROMANCES is branded with the rip-roaring action of frontier days as hard-riding men and their glamorous women recreate the pulse-quickening drama of the untamed West. Here is the roar of blazing guns, the lurking danger of the lonely range, the smashing, surging action that leads to excitement and romance.

Yes, all the thrilling adventure of the wild West is yours when you subscribe to RANCH ROMANCES. And what's more, you'll get it at a big saving . . . because if you were to buy 16 copies individually, they'd cost you $4.00. But as a subscriber, you get them for only $3.00—a saving of a full dollar. Think of it—for only $3, less than the cost of the average book, —you get 16 issues of RANCH ROMANCES . . . more than 2200 pages of hard-hitting, pulse-quickening western reading. And remember, all RANCH ROMANCES stories are brand NEW; there's not a reprint in the entire batch.

So, fill in and mail the coupon below with $3. Do it right now to make sure you don't miss a single copy of RANCH ROMANCES.

Ranch Romances • Dept. TR-11 • 10 East 40th Street • New York 16, N.Y.

Count me in, Partner! Please enter a subscription to RANCH ROMANCES in my name at the special rate of 16 issues (32 weeks) for only $3. My remittance is enclosed.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ Zone _____ State _____

(Add Postage: Canada 50c. Foreign $1.00)

Shades of Davy Crockett

A HILLBILLY who couldn't so much as write his own name at the age of 15 became a U.S. Congressman at 35, a national celebrity at 40, and died a martyr to freedom at 50. His name? Davy Crockett.

Our country's most remarkable frontiersman lived at Muscle Shoals during his middle years, when he rose to fame, at what is now the site of TVA—the Tennessee Valley Authority reclamation system. This year, as the Reclamation Service celebrates its semi-centennial, it would be mighty interesting if we could get Davy's opinion of TVA and the many immense engineering projects on the nation's major waterways.

To begin with, he would be shocked at the disappearance of his beloved Appalachian wilderness, which mark of "progress" made huge dam-building necessary. Even greater would be his shock when told that three-quarters of a billion is spent annually to build and maintain them.

Davy was probably the most uncouth character the voters ever sent to Washington. He may have been keen on frontier matters, but among trained statesmen, he was an amusing ignoramus. He had never been out of the backwoods and had attended school only four days in his life. However, his colleagues soon learned that he had a homespun wisdom that enabled him to face the issues of the day. Also, he had an inexhaustible fund of droll stories. Consequently, he could influence his listeners in a way that was the envy of educated orators.

When roundabout methods seemed to slow up action, Davy would say:

"Gentlemen, you don't have to drink a barrel dry to find out what's in it. One sniff at the bunghole tells you whether it's vinegar or whisky."

More often than not, Davy disagreed with majority opinions. He would probably disagree with our present national flood-control program, and go along with its critics, such as Claude D. Kelley of Alabama, head of the National Wildlife Federation.

"The cause of floods," Kelley says, "are over-farmed croplands, over-grazed grasslands and over-logged forests. Big dams and levees cannot prevent floods. Government engineers have made it worse by channeling and narrowing natural streams.

"You're talking plain common sense, mister," Davy would probably say. "Makes me think of a corn doctor that cut off a fellow's little toe to get rid of a bunion. Next patient asked that doctor if he used the same sort of treatment to get rid of a headache. These here dam builders are killin' the patient."

Davy Crockett would surely have some picturesque remarks on the latest wrinkle in the water problem. In California they're starting to charge growers so much a gallon for water pumped out of the ground.

You can just about hear Davy as he clambers to his feet and drawls:

"Well, gentlemen, about the only thing left that the politicians ain't taxing us for is the air we breathe. But by jiminy, it's coming to that, I reckon. Matter of fact, it's come about already. How about these here air-conditioning systems I see, which are needed in the big cities to make the air fit for a man to draw into his lungs!"

In Davy's time, the bounty of nature was free to all men—not only air and water, but fish and game, which was so abundant. Davy would go right up through the shingles once he heard that 35 millions were collected last year in fishing licenses alone in the 48 states.

"Well, I'll be!" he would exclaim. "Why gentlemen, back in 1830, we ran the whole country on less than that! Even with Pork-barrel Jim Polk running the shebang. No wonder they're making the pockets in men's clothes smaller and smaller!"

But for all his amiable ways, the third time Davy Crockett came up for reelection he was defeated by a narrow margin. (A crooked count, he always insisted).

By this time, the Tennessee frontier was getting too settled up for Davy's tastes, so he migrated westward—to Texas. The rest is well known to every schoolboy and girl. Joining the Texas independence movement, he was one of that immortal company of brave men who died in defense of the Alamo in 1836.

The role of soldier was not a new one for Davy. He had cut his eye teeth as an Indian fighter in the Creek War of 1812-15. He volunteered as a scout and came out a lieutenant-colonel of militia. Although he called himself a settler-farmer, he did far more hunting and trapping than farming. There was always a pack of hunting hounds on the Crockett doorstep, in good times and lean. And the lean years were many, for Davy's life was beset by many reverses and disasters. Most of his life he was broke.

"In a way of speaking, I led a dog's life," Davy declared in his memoirs. "But I ain't fretting none in saying that. I've noticed that dogs are a heap happier than most folks."

Davy Crockett wrote his own life history about the time he headed for Texas, when the dark angel was already hovering over the gifted, restless backwoodsman from Tennessee. For all his patriotic services and renown for straight thinking on such complicated and controversial issues as foreign tariff, what did he list as his greatest accomplishment? The killing of 105 bears in one year!

UNIFORMS SELL BIG!

Earn Money—Full or Spare Time with TOPPS—America's Foremost Line of Embroidered Uniforms and Work Clothes!

You need no experience, no special know-how to clean up big spare-time profits with TOPPS Uniforms and Work Clothes, embroidered to advertise. Prospects are everywhere—garages, service stations, factories, lumber yards, institutions, stores—they're all sold on the POWERFUL day-after day advertising employee uniforms give them. And they buy the TOPPS line after one look—for TOPPS offers the finest fabrics, expertly tailored for long wear and perfect fit—PLUS custom-made embroidery for any business! Yes, you'll take orders fast—and every one puts a big, spot-cash commission in your pocket. One Topps salesman made $800 profit on single sale.

ORLON Uniforms Available Soon!

TOPPS will be FIRST with uniforms made of Dupont's miracle ORLON fabric. They're snag-proof, mildew-proof; never need dry cleaning. They're washable! Get all the facts and actual sample now!

Mail Coupon for Free Outfit!

Everything you need to start making money at once is waiting for you FREE! The powerful, full-colored Topps Style Book, order forms, etc.—it's all yours for the asking. Just mail coupon below . . . and you're on your way to the biggest earnings of your life by return mail!

TOPPS, Dept. 4111 Rochester, Ind.

TOPPS, Dept. 4111, Rochester, Indiana
Please send me the FREE Topps Line by return mail.
Name ..... Age .....
Address .....
City ..... State .....
Have You Ever Sold Before? .....
What Product? .....

LAW . . .

STUDY AT HOME Legally trained men win higher positions and bigger success in business and public life. Greater opportunities now than ever before.

More Ability: More Prestige: More Money We guide you step by step. You can train at home during spare time. Degree of LL.B. We furnish all text material, including 14-volume Law Library. Low cost, easy terms. Get our valuable 48-page "Law Training for Leadership" and "Evidence" books FREE. Send NOW.

LASALLE EXTENSION UNIVERSITY, 417 South Dearborn Street
A Correspondence Institution Dept. 11329L Chicago 5, Ill.

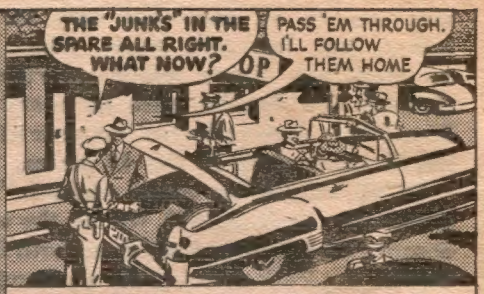
MAKE EXTRA MONEY

EVERY BUSINESS EVERYWHERE USES UNION LABEL BOOK MATCHES

No experience needed to earn big daily commissions. Be a direct factory representative of the world's largest exclusive UNION LABEL Book Match manufacturer. Prospects everywhere. Feature Glamour Girls, Hillbillies, scenics and dozens of other styles—Double Books—Jumbo Books—nearly 100 color combinations. New, bigger portfolio makes this fastest selling line a real profit maker for you. Write TODAY for full details.

SUPERIOR MATCH CO.
Dept. R-1152, 7528 S. Greenwood Ave., Chicago 19, Illinois
West Coast Salesmen, write Box 1087, San Jose, Calif.

OPIUM SMUGGLERS MEET THEIR MATCH WHEN...



HOMEWARD BOUND AFTER A DAY AT TIJUANA, SENATOR BLAIK AND HIS DAUGHTER STOP AT THE BORDER FOR ROUTINE CUSTOM INSPECTION...

AMAZING! YOU SAY THEY PUT IT IN THE TIRE AT THAT PARKING LOT?
EXACTLY! AND TONIGHT THE GANG AT THIS END WILL TRY TO NAB IT. MAY I USE YOUR 'PHONE?

THAT'S THAT. WELL, YOU FOLKS HAVE YOUR DINNER. I'LL BE BACK ABOUT NIGHTFALL
WHY NOT STAY AND HAVE A SNACK WITH US?
SURE. COME UPSTAIRS AND FRESHEN UP

THIS BLADE SURE MAKES SHORT WORK OF WHISKERS. MY FACE FEELS GREAT!
I'M SOLD ON THIN GILLETTES. THEY'RE PLENTY KEEN AND LONG-LASTING

WHEN YOU'RE OUT TO GET QUICK, EASY SHAVES AT A SAVING, THIN GILLETTES ARE JUST YOUR DISH. YOU CAN'T FIND ANOTHER LOW-PRICE BLADE SO KEEN AND LONG-LASTING. THIN GILLETTES ARE MADE FOR YOUR GILLETTE RAZOR... FIT EXACTLY AND PROTECT YOUR FACE FROM NICKS AND IRRITATION. ASK FOR THIN GILLETTES IN THE CONVENIENT 10-BLADE PACKAGE
THIN Gillette 10 BLADES
10-25¢
4-10¢
TEN-BLADE PACKAGE HAS COMPARTMENT FOR USED BLADES

WESTERNETTES

A Roundup of Range News Oddities

By

HAROLD HELFER

The hair of Jim Bridger, famed frontier scout who discovered Great Salt Lake, turned white overnight while he was being pursued by Blackfeet Indians in Big Sandy Valley.

The tourist said to the old Western guide, "I heard you shot many a bear around here in your day."

"More'n a hundred anyway," was the reply.

"I'll bet," prodded the tourist, "you must have had some narrow escapes."

The old-timer shifted his wad, aimed at the cuspidor and rang it dead center. Then he peered down the barrel of his rifle and said, "Son, if they was any narrer escapes had, them b'ars was the ones had 'em."

It seems like we'll have to give Texas credit for another "biggest"—it's the Lucas No. 1, an oil gusher near Beaumont, which for a while produced more than 75,000 barrels per day. Gush sakes!

Another oil story, coming out of the rich field at Durant, Oklahoma, has to do with the legend found typed on a $1 bill: "The last of $100,000 fortune spent on wine, women and song," it read.

Well, as we've always said, there's no fool like an oiled fool.

Sheep ranchers in Cardston, Canada, feel they have the coyote problem licked, thanks to a new deadly poison named "1080." Last year the coyotes slaughtered 323 sheep in the area, but since the first poison was used last fall, ranchers report seeing only six live coyotes in the district and not a single sheep has been cut down by the killers.

Much as we rebel against the thought of poisoning animals, whose only crime lies in being carnivorous, as is man himself, when the livelihood of people is at stake most any means seems to justify the end. It's the old law of the survival of the fittest, where coyotes and all other animals have always come out second best.

The biggest Indian that ever lived—so far as is known, that is—was old Big Bill who roamed around Oklahoma. He was eight feet around the waist and weighed 642 pounds.

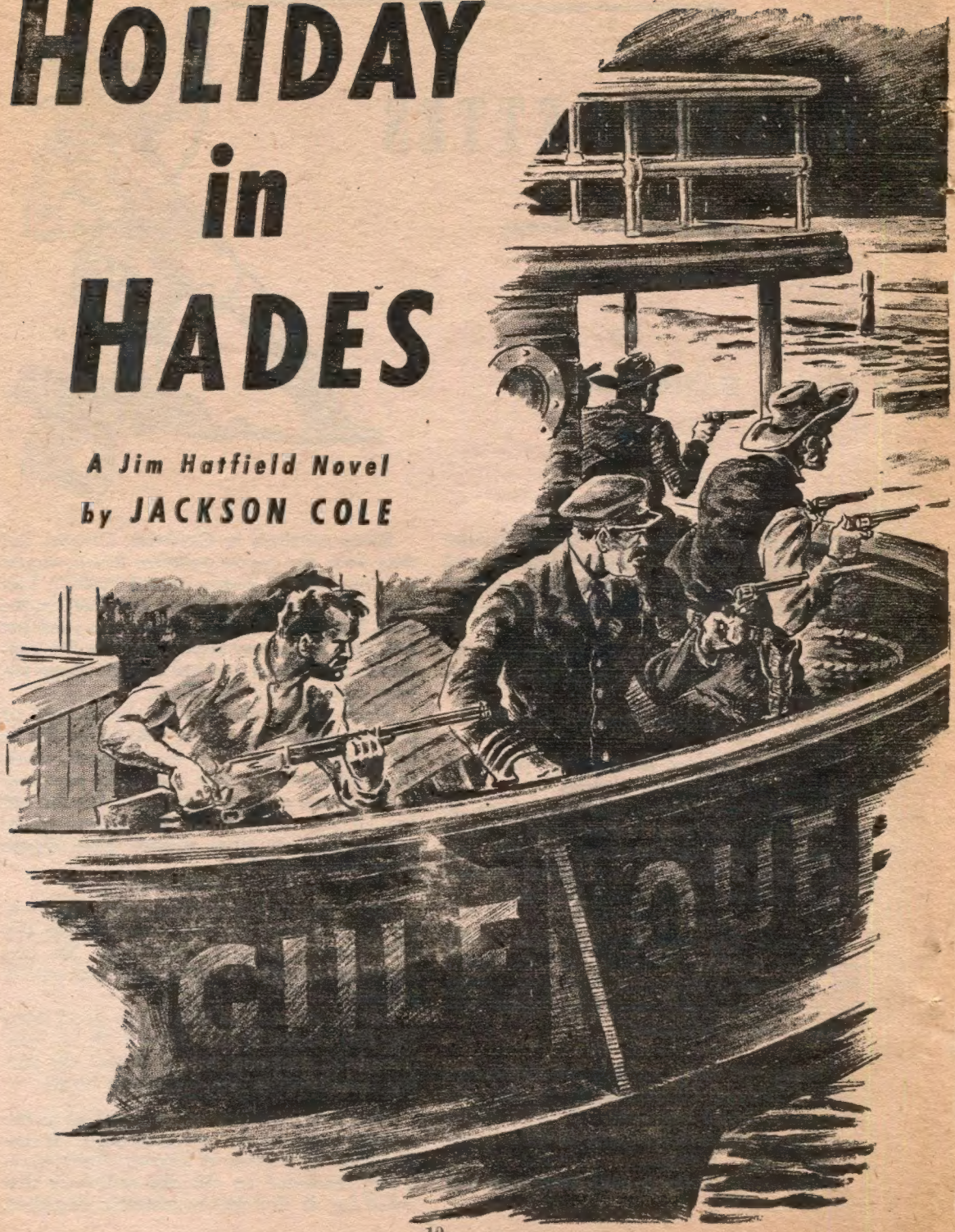
All we can say is that it's a good thing Big Bill stayed in the West with no worries about squeezing into a subway car during rush hours or into a telehone booth.

Now here's an item which seems to us the spitting image of something or other. It says that the city council of Tucson, Arizona, recently rescinded an old city ordinance that called for all churches to maintain cuspidors.

HOLIDAY in HADES

A Jim Hatfield Novel

by JACKSON COLE



The thunderous blast of guns filled the harbor

CHAPTER I

Forced Vacation

"YOU need a rest, Jim," said Captain Bill McDowell, eyeing the ash on his cigar. "You've been working too hard and too long."

Jim Hatfield smiled at the cigarette he was shaping. "What would I do with a rest?"

"Don't you know how to relax?"

"I'm always relaxed."

McDowell snorted and peered through the cigar smoke, but he knew it was true. He'd never seen a more relaxed man than this big Ranger.

"Didn't you ever learn how to enjoy life, man?" he asked irritably.

"Always enjoy life," Hatfield drawled, putting a match to his cigarette and drawing with deep satisfaction.

McDowell snorted again and stared at him coldly. That also was true, but the fact remained that Hatfield looked gaunt, worn and tired. The green eyes were bright but sunken, the brown cheeks slightly hollowed under prominent cheekbones, the strong nose and jaws standing out sharper than ever.

Some laughed at the rumor of a rebel Mexican army making a play

to regain Texas, but the Lone Wolf knew it was no laughing matter

"You're taking a vacation, Jim — a month, at least."

"Those new recruits need drilling, Cap'n."

"You're no drill master," McDowell said, smiling behind the cigar. "But if you really want and insist on doing that, why—"

"There's things I'd rather do," Hatfield said hastily.

"Do 'em, then," McDowell told him gruffly. "I'm putting you on off-duty status for a month. Do whatever you like, Jim. Get out of the state for a while. Try riding the rails instead of a horse. Go up to Washington and see Lloyd Seagrave. You've got a standing invitation there."

Hatfield shook his fine dark head. "I'd like to see Lloyd well enough, but I don't like politicians."

"You're wasting my time, Ranger," said Bill McDowell brusquely. "I don't care where you go or what you do. You're on your own. Hang up your guns, leave Goldy in the stable, and go have some fun for yourself. Read and loaf. Gamble and get drunk. Make love to the girls." The captain gestured impatiently. "A young feller like you ought to know what to do with a month's free time, Jim."

Hatfield rose with effortless ease to his towering, graceful height.

"All right, Cap'n Bill, I won't bother you any more. But if Chico Pereda should invade Texas, I reckon I could cut my vacation short?"

"Pereda?" McDowell said. "That maniac thinks he's Santa Ana reborn! He's raised a rabble of an army, and is really planning to cross the Rio Grande, I hear."

"Madmen do strange things," Hatfield commented. "I understand he's got a lot of Americans with him now, some of them ex-military men. Like that big King Gaffney, who was cashiered out of the United States Army."

McDOWELL grunted and gnawed his cigar. "Yes, there may be trouble eventually. I'll admit it to you, where I wouldn't to most people. But you're still going on leave, Jim. I insist on that. If trouble breaks out on the Border, however, you can come back on active duty. Satisfied?"

Hatfield smiled boyishly. "Sure, Cap'n Bill. I'm easy to satisfy. I just like to hear you roar once in a while."

"Get out!" McDowell came to his feet with a bellow. "I've got work to do, dammit!"

"Sure, Cap'n, sure." Hatfield saluted, grinned pleasantly, and turned out the office door.

Bill McDowell's eyes and features softened, as he looked after that high broad-shouldered figure with warmth and fondness, love and respect. If he only knew how I'd like to be going with him, McDowell thought wistfully. If he had any idea what he meant to me and the Rangers and the whole State of Texas.

So it was that Jim Hatfield left Austin, and several days later led his big golden sorrel aboard the *Gulf Queen*, anchored in Galveston Bay, a freighter which also carried passengers. Immaculate in rich tailored broadcloth and fine linen, Hatfield looked more like a prosperous rancher or business man than a two-gun Ranger on leave. He had packed his gunbelt, but he wore one Colt in a shoulder-holster under his left arm. He was barbered and groomed to perfection, and took a certain pleasure in this feeling of elegant well-being, yet he felt like a masquerader without his worn, comfortable range garb.

The *Gulf Queen* was bound down the coast for Matamoros, at the mouth of the Rio Grande. Hatfield had decided to go there and avail himself of the long-offered hospitality of an old friend named Henry DeWitt, who owned and operated the Harbor Hotel. Perhaps later he would go upstream and visit Laredo.

Something drew him toward the Border, and Jim Hatfield knew what it was. The threat of Chico Pereda and King Gaffney and their Mexican army. Most Texans refused to take them seriously, or believe that they'd ever become more than a minor nuisance, but Hatfield saw it differently. And he was curious about Pereda and Gaffney, and their dream of conquest and empire.

Stowing his gear in the cabin, Hatfield found it small but neat and clean. After watching the steamer cast off from the dock and head southward away from Galveston Island, Hatfield repaired to the little saloon and ordered whisky. There were two other passengers at the bar, men with dark Latin faces, but dressed in expensive American clothes. Affable and friendly, they bought Hatfield a drink, and introduced themselves when he returned the favor.

The tall, trim good-looking one was

JIM HATFIELD AND GOLDY

named Rivera, the short, wide one Lopez. They said they were tourists, returning from their travels in the United States. Hatfield had booked as Hathaway, a cattleman from the upper Brazos. The Mexicans seemed a jolly, carefree pair, but Hatfield sensed a certain antagonism beneath the surface. Perhaps it was purely racial and insignificant, yet the Ranger doubted if they were as happy-go-lucky and harmless as they appeared.

"Have you seen the beautiful lady on board, Señor Hathaway?" inquired Rivera, in his precise, unaccented English.

Hatfield said he hadn't, suspecting some joke, but Lopez spread his hands in an eloquent gesture. "It is true, señor, she is a lovely thing. We saw many beauties in your country, but none to equal this one. Unfortunately she lacks interest in men. Even the great Rivera fails to impress her."

Rivera smiled with flashing charm. "Sad but true. I have always enjoyed a moderate success with the women, but this one ignores me."

"Maybe she's married," Hatfield said. "Or in love with somebody else."

"Ah, that is a typical American viewpoint," Rivera remarked, with slight disparagement. "But on board ship most women forget such ties. Something about an ocean voyage lowers their resistance, as a general thing. But not this girl. She has the look of heat, but she is cold as ice."

THE Mexicans fell into a frank and rather bawdy discussion of the opposite sex, and Hatfield soon excused himself to take a turn about the deck.

The *Gulf Queen* often transported supplies and equipment for the Ranger headquarters at Austin, and Hatfield was pleased to find two acquaintances among the deckhands. The stocky, blond Swede Larssen, and slim gay Art Loomis, whom he had met when picking up Ranger consignments on previous voyages. They were equally happy to see Hatfield.

"My two seagoing cowboys," Hatfield greeted them, laughing. "How are you, Swede and Art? Thought maybe you'd jumped ship and gone back to punching cattle by this time."

"Not yet, Jim, but we're going to do that," Larssen declared. "We're fed up with life on a freighter, and that's no lie."

"We been down admiring that big golden horse of yours, Jim," said Loomis. "It sure makes a man want to straddle leather again to see a horse like that. Bet he'd make a good cowpony, too."

"Goldy's worked cattle," Hatfield said. "He's done a little of everything."

"Like you, huh, Jim?" Loomis grinned.

"Better than me," Hatfield said, smiling back at the young fellow.

The he told them he was traveling incognito, under the name of Hathaway and was off-duty, and they nodded understandingly. His secret was safe with those two, and their company was especially gratifying after being in the presence of Rivera and Lopez.

"I hear the Rangers are recruiting a lot of men," Swede Larssen said. "Art and me have been wondering if we could make the grade there."

"I'm sure you could, boys," Hatfield told them. "We're always glad to get men like you."

"A couple more voyages and maybe we'll hit Austin," said Loomis.

Larssen wagged his blond head sorrowfully. "It's that girl he's got in New Orleans, Jim. She's keeping us hogtied to this scow. He just can't forget her, the poor dumb skullhead."

Loomis grinned without resentment. "That redhead on board could make me forget her fast. But she ain't looking at any sailors."

"I'm hearing a lot about this female passenger," Hatfield said.

Loomis tossed his curly brown head. "Wait'll you see her, Jim! She's down looking at the horses now, I think."

"Maybe that's my chance," Hatfield said, with a smile. "Maybe Goldy will win her over, if nothing else can. I'll see you boys later."

"I hope that suit's warm, Jim," Art Loomis said, laughing. "You're heading for a heavy frost, maybe a freeze-out."

Hatfield descended to the well deck, where the horses were tethered amidst bales and crates of cargo. The girl had turned from her own mount to stare at Goldy in the dimness. She was rather tall for a woman, her figure fashioned in flowing grace and full lush curves, slender yet firmly rounded and richly feminine.

The hair piled on her high-held proud head had a coppery brilliance even in this dusky light. Her profile was sculptured in fine cameo-clear lines. She seemed unaware of Hatfield, and he stood watching her for a timeless interval.

Finally, reluctantly, he moved forward, and the great sorrel stallion nickered softly in greeting. The girl turned full-face toward him, and Hatfield saw with relief that her mouth was broad and full, generous and gracious, giving her features a warm human quality that saved them from cold austerity.

Her eyes, greener than his own, were large, clear and luminous, under long lashes and arched brows. The purity of her brow and throat made something catch hurtingly behind his Adam's apple. Her fragrance reached him through the smell of horses and the musky dampness.

"Your horse?" she murmured. "What a magnificent creature! I've always wanted a sorrel like that."

HATFIELD inclined his dark head. "Thank you, ma'am."

"I'm Jean Tremblay," she said, holding out her hand.

"Jim Hathaway," he mumbled in surprise, taking her hand and thrilling to the touch.

"I wish I could ride him—some day."

"Maybe you can, Miss Tremblay. If you're getting off at Matamoros."

"That's where I'm going, Mr. Hathaway." She looked up at him with frank interest. "There is something familiar about you, but I'm sure we haven't met before. Strange, isn't it?"

"Never had this pleasure before, I regret to say," Hatfield said, rubbing Goldy's nose and stroking his neck.

"You love him, don't you? But who could help it? And he loves you, of course."

Hatfield smiled gravely. "We've been pardners a long time."

"You go well together," Jean Tremblay murmured. "You seem to belong together— Well, I must be getting above deck. Are you—"

Hatfield nodded. "If you don't mind, I'll walk with you."

"Thank you. There are two Mexican gentlemen aboard who have been rather annoying." She frowned with distaste.

"I don't know why Latin men think they are so utterly irresistible to women."

"I met them in the bar," Hatfield said.

"I'd like a drink," Jean Tremblay admitted. "But I won't go in that saloon. Would you—would it be all right if we had a drink in my cabin? Some friends gave me a bottle of fine bourbon."

"That'd be real nice," Hatfield drawled, thinking wryly that he had Goldy to thank for this. He sure owed that sorrel a lot, including his life.

CHAPTER II

Matamoros Moonlight

EVEN though the bourbon was excellent, the girl's company was even more stimulating than the liquor, and she and Jim Hatfield became quite well acquainted over a couple of drinks. Jean Tremblay made a man feel strong and handsome, important and indomitable, and Hatfield was treading on air when he left her cabin. And bumped into Rivera and Lopez, who eyed him with wise, knowing smirks and coarse gestures.

"Congratulations," Rivera said, and there was something close to jealous hatred burning in his liquid black eyes. "You work fast—for a gringo."

Hatfield stifled his anger, not wanting any trouble to mar this voyage or his vacation. "We both happen to be horse lovers, that's all," he said quietly.

The Mexicans laughed with lewd mockery and disbelief. Rivera said, "So it took horses to melt the ice, senor? It's too bad I overlooked that possibility. There's always some quick way to a woman's arms."

"You've got it all wrong, Rivera," said Hatfield coldly.

"He's jealous, that Rivera," confided Lopez slyly. "He can't stand losing any woman to any other man."

"Shut up, fool!" Rivera said harshly. "I haven't lost any yet. I never lose anything I want. Remember that, Hathaway."

Hatfield smiled slowly. "You're fortunate, Rivera," he drawled gently, and strode indifferently onward, leaving Lopez chuckling and Rivera glaring blackly after him.

Hatfield knew he was going to have trouble with those two. He had sensed it from the start. And it irked him to have his holiday begin under the threat of violent conflict.

Back in his own cabin, Hatfield discovered that someone had been through his luggage and belongings. Luckily there was nothing to identify him as Jim Hatfield, the Lone Wolf, of the Texas Rangers, but he was puzzled and perturbed. Someone on board was suspicious of him already. Perhaps Rivera and Lopez did have something on their minds besides women and whisky. Or it might have been someone other than those two.

He'd have to study and watch the rest of the passengers and the crew. And never turn his back on Rivera and Lopez. A survey of the other passengers and the ship's crew revealed no clues as to whoever had ransacked the Ranger's stateroom.

The cruise down the west side of the Gulf of Mexico was peaceful and pleasant, despite Hatfield's dire forebodings. He spent much of his time with Jean Tremblay, and they had become good friends. The Mexicans resented this, but something kept them from moving openly against Hatfield, restricting Rivera to hateful glances and slurring undertone remarks, provoking a kind of malicious amusement in Lopez. Sometimes Hatfield thought the squat, ugly Lopez was more dangerous than the big handsome Rivera.

When not with Jean Tremblay, Hatfield occupied himself in talking with young Art Loomis and husky Swede Larssen, or in discussions with Captain Carlstrum, a sober, thoughtful man of quiet dignity. The seamen were more concerned with the Mexican problem than Captain McDowell had been.

"Things are really seething in Old Mexico," Carlstrum informed the Ranger.

"Chico Pereda may be a fanatic but he has a great following south of the Border. And King Gaffney has gathered a considerable force of renegade Americans, professional soldiers and outlaw killers with military experience. I don't expect they'll ever get far in Texas, but they can do a great deal of damage before they're put down. The Rio Grande is practically unguarded on our side except for a few scattered Rangers and a skeleton Border Patrol."

"That's right, Captain," agreed Hatfield. "The Army should be down here, but you can't convince Washington of that."

Carlstrum nodded sternly. "A couple of companies of cavalry would do it, I believe."

"We're recruiting Rangers, but not fast enough, I'm afraid," Hatfield said. "Do you know anything about Rivera and Lopez, Captain?"

"No, but I don't like the looks of them."

"And Jean Tremblay?" pursued Hatfield, feeling a trace of guilt.

A SOMBER smile deepened the wrinkles in Carlstrum's seamed face. "Who can tell, Jim, about a woman as lovely and smart as that? But so far as I know she's a loyal American, even though she spends a lot of time south of the Rio Grande. From an old respectable and wealthy family, I understand, yet something of a mystery."

It was mid-afternoon when the *Gulf Queen* wallowed up-river and docked in the sweltering tropical heat of the harbor at Matamoros. Rivera and Lopez vanished at once. Larssen and Loomis and other sailors were sweating about the cargo booms and the hold, when Jean Tremblay and Hatfield led their horses down the gangplank onto the wharf.

The adobe town sprawled along the southern shore of the Rio Grande, marked by the usual open plazas and missions of a Mexican settlement. They rode away from the bustling warehouses and parted in the main plaza, where the Harbor Hotel stood, with a date for dinner that evening.

Henry DeWitt, a pudgy, balding man with a smooth boyish face and a winning smile, was delighted to see Hatfield, and got him settled immediately in one of his most elaborate and comfortable rooms. Breaking out a bottle of old brandy, DeWitt lounged and chatted while Hatfield shaved, bathed, and dressed in fresh clothing.

"I hope you will spend the entire month here, Jim," said DeWitt, beaming over his glass. "My library and liquor cabinet are at your disposal, and in Jean Tremblay you have met our loveliest lady."

"A man shouldn't ask for much more, Henry," said Hatfield. "I've looked forward to settling down here in luxury, with your fine books and your rare liquor and your charming conversation—But do you feel much tension and unrest here, Henry?"

DeWitt sighed and gestured in mock despair. "I might have known you wouldn't sit back and enjoy a vacation. You're ready to go to work already, Jim. But I must admit there is a certan amount of turbulence beneath the surface here and all along the Border. The Mexican people are not overly fond of peace. And they still feel that Texas belongs to them."

"That's understandable," Hatfield said thoughtfully. "It did once, but they lost it. And they'll never win it back, Henry."

"No, but they'll keep trying," DeWitt said. "Come on, drink up, Jim. Let's not spoil this reunion with talk of politics and war."

Dinner was a festive occasion in the Harbor Hotel dining room, with DeWitt the perfect host and Jean Tremblay more stunning than ever in a low-cut gown of green satin, her coppery head agleam in the candle-light. The sparkling repartee between the girl and DeWitt made Hatfield feel slow and dull and left-out, but Jean was constantly reassuring him with her brilliant green eyes and warm, smiling mouth.

Afterward Hatfield and Jean strolled about the moonlit streets, through the noisy colorful plazas where mournful Spanish music sounded, and past ancient missions in which the bells were chiming. It was picturesque under the lofty moon,

with a salty tang from the Gulf mingling with the odors of spiced foods and tropical plants and flowers. There were adobe-walled haciendas and gardens, quaint archways and narrow mysterious passages, and mocking birds fluted with liquid sweetness from the chinaberry trees.

When Jean finally said she was tired, they took a carriage to the great walled-in stone house on the outskirts, where she was staying with old friends of her family. As Hatfield said good night to her, within the outer gate, the girl suddenly leaned into his arms, clutching him tight, her fine clear face uplifted.

With surprising strength, she pulled his head down and kissed him on the lips. Then, freeing herself instantly, she said, "Be careful, Jim. You may have enemies here. Please be careful and watch out."

With that she turned, almost running, toward the grand ornamented entrance of the mansion.

Returning to the street, awed and shaken, Hatfield's bewilderment increased as he found the carriage gone, in spite of the fact that he had instructed the driver to wait for him. Well, there was nothing to do but walk back to the hotel.

The street was absolutely silent and empty, except for the sound of his own boots on the board walk. He touched the gun under his left armpit, and decided he'd start wearing his regular gun harness again.

HATFIELD had gone about a block when a heavy body landed on his back with shocking suddenness, and iron arms locked his elbows from behind. Before he could begin to struggle, the tall, dapper form of Rivera appeared close in front of him, smiling with cold cruel menace.

"You've got a lesson coming to you, señor," Rivera said, and struck him savagely in the face, left and right, again and again.

Hatfield's head rocked and his face went numb under the smashing impacts. Lights flashed explosively behind his eyeballs. Then the blood and pain started, as Riv-

Jim Hatfield whirled and fired

era went on ripping away at his face with both fists.

Heaving and straining, Hatfield fought to break loose from the man on his back, but Lopez held on with gorilla-strength. Rivera shifted his attack to the abdomen, driving in low blows with wicked power, and Hatfield retched in nausea as the agony sheared through his vitals. Satisfied on that score, Rivera resumed battering at the Ranger's bleeding features, grunting with sadistic pleasure as he swung.

In a flaring burst of fury, Hatfield wrenched wildly and broke away from the leechlike Lopez on his back, lashing out at the surprised Rivera, knocking him flat. Hatfield whirled in time to stab a left into Lopez's ugly face as the squat Mexican charged in, but Lopez kept coming and drove Hatfield backward. The Ranger tripped over the fallen Rivera, and Lopez landed heavily on top of him, grinding with his knees and sledging his hands. Rolling and thrashing desperately, Hatfield hurled Lopez off and sprang upright, just in time to meet Rivera's rush.

Beating the Mexican's guard down, Hatfield hammered home a solid crushing one-two, and Rivera went down on the back of his neck, legs high in the air. Lopez was up and coming, as Rivera's legs settled with a crash on the slats. Hatfield unleashed a left and right into that dark froglike countenance. Lopez lurched back and fell in a wisted sprawl across Rivera, who was on hands and knees now.

Hatfield reached for his shoulder holster, but Rivera came lunging in low and struck him at the knees before he could draw the gun. They hit the gutter in a thrashing tangle, with Rivera slugging at the Ranger's groin. Breathless, torn with agony, and arm-weary, Hatfield knew he was nearly spent. If Lopez got up again, he was finished. And Lopez was getting up and reeling toward them, setting himself to kick Hatfield's face in.

A voice penetrated the steaming firelit haze that fogged Hatfield's brain.

"That's enough, you two! Swing that boot and you'll get a slug in your guts! Don't you damn Mexicans ever fight fair and even?" For a moment, no one moved.

Rivera let go and crawled off Hatfield, getting up groggily to stand beside Lopez, both of them staring stupidly at the two Americans who had come up with guns in hand. Hatfield clambered slowly to his feet, chest heaving as he sobbed painfully for breath, blood streaming down his lean face.

"You want to do a job on them two dogs, pardner?" asked the big broad man who had spoken first.

Jim Hatfield shook his aching head, and pressed at the pain in his abdomen. "I'll get 'em," he panted. "My own time—and way."

"All right, you Mexes, get going!" the bulky man ordered. "Move out pronto, before my trigger finger gets to itching any more."

"We ought to shoot 'em anyway, Burke," drawled the thin, lanky man at his side.

"Reckon not, Silk. This hombre here probably wants 'em himself, and he rates first chance at 'em."

Lopez and Rivera were hustling away, weaving on unsteady legs, and the wide-shouldered man turned to Hatfield. "I'm Burke Coram and this is Silk Servoss. Sorry we didn't get here a little earlier. Can you walk, mister? Are you all right?"

Hatfield held out a bloody hand. "Much obliged, boys. The name's Jim Hathaway. I'm all right. I can walk."

"We're going into town, Hathaway," said Burke Coram. "We'll string along with you. What was that all about anyway?"

"A girl, I guess. They took me by surprise."

"Sure, they would," drawled Silk Servoss. "That's the way they always fight, the scum." His voice was mild and flat, but there was contempt in the way he spat.

"Take it easy," Burke Coram said, as they started walking. "No hurry at all. It's a nice moonlight night to be out in."

"It *was* a nice night," Hatfield muttered ruefully, grinning with gashed, swollen lips.

When they came to a horse trough, he

washed the blood off his face and hands, and ducked his throbbing head and sore face into the soothing water.

CHAPTER III

Old Mexico

IT TURNED out that Coram and Servoss were also stopping at the Harbor Hotel, and on parting in the lobby they agreed to meet for drinks and lunch the next day at noon.

Henry DeWitt had a tub of hot water brought up to Hatfield's room, and Jim relaxed gratefully in the tub with DeWitt sitting by smoking his pipe and handing the Ranger a drink at regular intervals.

"Your holiday is off to a wonderful start," DeWitt remarked.

"Isn't it, though?" said Hatfield, lolling in the warm sudsy bath.

"You have an amazing penchant for trouble, Jim."

"I don't hunt it, Henry. It just seems to follow me around."

DeWitt shook his head. "At this rate, you'll really need a rest—by the time your vacation is over."

"It's not that bad," protested Hatfield. "Just a couple of Mexicans to take care of some time along the way."

"A wonder they didn't use knives on you, Jim."

"They didn't want to kill me, I reckon."

"They will next time," DeWitt declared.

"That'll make us even then," said Jim Hatfield. "Because I'll sure be wanting to kill them."

Jean Tremblay did not show up to keep her engagement with Hatfield on the following evening, and Jim was left in the rather agreeable company of Silk Servoss and Burke Coram, who admitted they were Border adventurers bent on making an easy dollar whenever possible.

Hatfield was inclined to like these two men, even though they professed no respect for the law and little loyalty to the United States. Playing a hunch, he intimated that he, too, was something of a reckless free-lance operator, without too much concern as to whether or not a profitable project was legal.

"We could use a man like you, Jim," said Burke Coram, his huge powerful bulk slumped indolently, his rugged features saturnine. "We're next to a deal that ought to make us plenty of money. The only drawback is it involves us with Pereda and his damn Mexicans."

"We'll be working mostly with Americans, though," Silk Servoss said, long slender fingers toying with his glass, a faint lazy smile on his thin, refined face. "Gaffney's got plenty of Americans down there. Interested, Jim?"

"Yes, I am," Hatfield said honestly. "I've got nothing cooking at present. I wouldn't mind a little excitement and some quick cash."

"We're heading west, Jim," said Coram. "The Mex army's in camp over near Monterey. You want to come along with us?"

"I sure do, Burke," said Hatfield, thinking that this break was altogether too good to pass up, almost too good to be true. An opportunity to be conducted straight to the headquarters of the Mexican forces led by Chico Pereda and King Gaffney! "What's the angle? Just joining up with 'em?"

Servoss's smile broadened. "No, they want us to divert a shipment of arms and ammunition for them. It ought to be fairly easy. You want to get in on it? Or are you too patriotic?"

"That Mex army won't ever amount to anything anyway," Coram said. "But we can make 'em happy by getting 'em some weapons to play with. And make ourselves a small fortune at the same time."

"Sounds good to me," Hatfield said. "I'm in—if you want me."

"That's fine, Jim," drawled Servoss. "We'll be riding in the morning."

"Reckon I'll go out and say good-by to —a friend," said Hatfield. "See you boys later, for a nightcap or two."

He went to the hotel stable, threw his saddle on Goldy, and rode out to the

walled stone house at the edge of town. A colored maid answered the clanking of the brass door-knocker. Miss Tremblay had left suddenly, she said, without leaving word as to her destination or when she would be coming back.

Sorely puzzled and hurt, Jim Hatfield cantered the sorrel back toward the central plaza of Matamoros. That Tremblay girl baffled him. He couldn't figure her out at all. Maybe she had led him into that trap last night. She seemed to know he was in danger, going to be attacked. And now she'd pulled out without a word. Well, he had bigger things than her to worry about.

HATFIELD wondered what he was getting into on this expedition of tomorrow. A rare chance to observe the enemy encampment at close hand, learn their strength and condition, and possibly their ultimate intentions. To identify Pereda and the traitorous Gaffney and their subordinates. To serve the United States, as few men have the opportunity to.

Of course if anyone in the camp recognized Jim Hatfield, he was a dead man. But he thought it was worth the risk, even though it was a strange way to spend a vacation. . . .

Four days later, after a leisurely ride across the sun-scorched plains of Old Mexico, they were approaching Valhalla, the grandiose name given to the military post at the foot of the mountains outside Monterey.

Jim Hatfield, at home once more in rough range clothes, with the two Colt .45s slung at his hips, was riding a big raw-boned blue roan, borrowed from DeWitt's stable. He had left Goldy behind regretfully, but realizing that the golden sorrel might help some of Gaffney's renegade Texans to identify him as a Ranger. There would undoubtedly be bandits down here who knew of the Lone Wolf and his famous golden horse. There might even be some who would recognize Hatfield on sight. It was a chance he had to take, and a daring one.

When the camp came into view, it was larger than Hatfield had anticipated. There must be a thousand men in bivouac, he estimated, but at closer range he perceived that many of these were unarmed, ragged and barefooted peons. Not much more than half the number had firearms, Hatfield decided, and some of them carried ancient outmoded weapons. But a shipment of guns and ammunition would make this a very real and formidable threat indeed, at least against the border towns of Texas.

They rode in through long rows of tents and lean-to shanties, and left their horses at a corral. It was shocking to find so many Americans in this enemy camp, and they were all well-armed and equipped for combat. Hatfield's spine went cold and his scalp tightened under their scrutiny. At any moment he expected a shout to go up, as some outlaw from north of the Border recognized him, but no such thing ocurred.

Burke Coram and Silk Servoss seemed to be well-known here, exchanging brief greetings with men on all sides, as they walked toward the long log cabin that was obviously headquarters. The Mexican flag flew above it, and two obsolete cannon flanked the entrance.

After an interminable wait in the busy anteroom, they were ushered into an inner office where two armed sentries stood at either end of the room. The two commanders sat at their desks pretending to be engrossed in endless paper work. When the great men deigned to look up, Hatfield was presented as Hathaway to General Pereda and General Gaffney. This was becoming more comic-opera as it went along, Hatfield thought, restraining an impulse to laugh aloud.

Chico Pereda, in full dress uniform despite the heat, was a small man with large negroid features and black bulging eyes that burned insanely beneath hooded lids. His blue tunic was adorned with heavy epaulets, big brass buttons, and much gold braid. His scarlet trousers were tucked into varnished boots.

He sat there with immense pompous dignity, a fanatical little man in a ridiculous uniform, drunk with power and

athirst for more. A madman who saw himself as a great leader and conqueror, hand on sword hilt even at his desk.

King Gaffney, a hulking, brawny giant of a man with a bold domineering red face and pale cold blue eyes, was in shirt sleeves and the yellow-striped blue pants of the U.S. Cavalry, a forage cap pushed back on his shaggy oversized head. He had been a good field officer against the Indians, it was said, until he had been court-martialed out of the Service. He wore a gunbelt with two army Colts in open tied-down holsters. In a way his small, cold eyes were more terrifying than the swollen fiery orbs of Pereda.

"Are you sure of this fellow?" Pereda demanded, in a surprisingly deep, strong voice, a stubby finger pointed at Hatfield.

"If we wasn't we wouldn't have brought him here, General," said Burke Coram.

"What about that shipment?" asked King Gaffney.

Coram said, "The *Gulf Queen's* carrying it on her next voyage. Due in Galveston the twenty-third, late afternoon or early evening."

"How many men will you need, Coram?"

"About twenty. The crew's unarmed except for knives. Only the captain and mates have pistols, and they won't carry 'em half the time. But there may be Rangers or townspeople around that we'll have to take care of."

"Should be simple enough," Gaffney said, yawning and stretching his mighty arms. "Three or four hundred new repeating rifles. Five hundred new Colt revolvers. And plenty of ammunition for both. With that, we can start moving and operating." He laughed harshly. "The Rangers' recruits will have to drill with broomsticks and toy pistols!"

"I want this new man tested," Chico Pereda announced, and even Gaffney glanced at him in surprise.

"How do you mean, General?" inquired Silk Servoss, with dim irony.

"That spy in the guardhouse. The Indian is working on him now. Let this man watch it. I am going to watch it myself." Pereda licked his full, thick lips.

Gaffney shrugged massively. "Why not, Chico? We'll all have a look. Break the monotony—and see how strong Hathaway's stomach is."

They all went out together, escorted by the two sentries, the small Pereda and the huge Gaffney marching ahead of the other three men. Hatfield began to feel faintly ill, and he could see that Coram and Servoss weren't pleased with the prospect either. Some poor wretch of a prisoner was evidently being tortured, and Chico Pereda was fairly bouncing in his eagerness to witness it.

They heard the screaming before they reached the adobe building with the barred windows. A horrible sound on the shimmering sunlit air, but the troopers they passed paid no attention. Obviously it was a routine matter in this encampment.

In the torture chamber a man lay spread-eagled on the rack, and Hatfield's stomach revolted at the hideous spectacle. The victim's arms and legs had been pulled out of joint, and his skin was gashed, burned and blistered, in many places.

The Apache turned a brutal impassive face from the wheel of the rack. "Won't talk," he said. "Won't say nothing. Too far gone now. Better to finish and kill."

"Not yet," Chico Pereda said, his protruding black eyes aglitter. "Give it another turn, 'Pache. Use the knife some more."

The Indian twisted the wheel, stretching the disjointed limbs still farther, and an unearthly screech burst from the half-conscious victim. Then, in spite of the mutilations and his own gagging sickness, Hatfield was almost certain he recognized the broken, dying man on the rack. Whittaker, a Border Patrol officer, from the Laredo area!

Hatfield looked down at the floor. On either side of him, Servoss and Coram were white-faced under the tan and trail dirt. Gaffney stood bored and indifferent, but Pereda was watching with avid lusting interest, like a glutton at a feast.

The Apache was working carefully with

a razor-edged knife now, his broad back directly in front of Hatfield. The screams were tearing the hot air, and the dripping blade was over Whittaker's breast. Jim Hatfield groaned and swayed, as if fainting, and fell forward, slamming hard against the Indian's back, thrusting at the elbow of the arm that guided the knife. The steel blade slid in to the hilt, under that sudden impact, and the screaming stopped at once.

CHAPTER IV

End of a "Feud"

HATFIELD lurched backward, and Coram and Servoss caught him between them. Chico Pereda whirled with a snarl and reached high to slap Hatfield viciously across the face. Restraining himself with a tremendous effort, Hatfield remained sagging on the arms of Coram and Servoss. The Apache was staring down at the dead man.

"Clumsy, chicken-livered fool!" spat Pereda, striking again. "Maybe you want to go on that rack yourself!"

"He couldn't help it," Burke Coram growled. "He passed out, General. And I ain't feeling so good myself."

"Enough, Chico," said King Gaffney, taking the little man's arm and propelling him toward the door. "Time to end the thing anyway. That man had suffered enough to satisfy anybody—but you."

They went outside, and Hatfield stumbled after them, half-supported by his companions.

"What a hell of a thing," Servoss drawled in disgust. "How you feeling now, Jim?"

"I'll be all right—out in the air," Hatfield muttered, not daring to recover too quickly.

But Burke Coram wasn't deceived in the least. "That took nerve, Jim," he whispered. "Wanted to do it myself, but didn't dare to. I don't mind good clean killing, but *that*—"

"Pereda's crazy," Silk Servoss said.

"Sure, he's crazy," agreed Coram. "It shows in his eyes."

Jim Hatfield was silent, thinking of Whittaker, thinking of his wife and children at home. Pereda and Gaffney had to die, and Hatfield longed for the time when he could throw down on them, blast the life out of their rotten carcasses. It was all he could do to keep from going after them right now, regardless of consequences.

But it would have to wait. There were greater issues at stake here. At least, Whittaker was out of it and at peace now. And the time would come when Hatfield would turn his guns loose on Chico Pereda and King Gaffney.

That night Hatfield walked alone about the firelit camp, while Coram and Servoss selected the riders for their mission to Galveston. In the office at headquarters, Gaffney and Pereda were in conference with their staff officers.

At the perimeter of the post, Hatfield came upon a small snug adobe house, and spotted something through a rear window that brought him to a frozen standstill. A woman was moving about the lamplit interior. A girl with coppery red hair burnished in the light. It couldn't possibly be, yet it was—Jean Tremblay, or her identical twin!

Hatfield moved to the half-opened window and stared inside. It was Jean, without any question, but what in the world was she doing in this Valhalla of the enemy? The girl saw him then, and her green eyes widened in shocked astonishment. She came swiftly to the window, finger to her lips.

"Quiet, Jim," she whispered. "There's a guard out front."

"What are you doing here, Jean?" he asked wonderingly.

"I'm a prisoner. You'd better go now."

"I'll get you out of here," Hatfield said.

"No, no, you can't. Not yet anyway.—How'd you get here, Jim?"

"With some friends."

"You aren't joining up with this rabble?"

Hatfield grinned. "Not hardly, Jean. But

I'm making believe join. They treating you all right?"

"So far, I couldn't ask for better treatment. I don't know how long it'll last."

"How'd they get you, Jean?" asked Hatfield.

"King Gaffney has always wanted me," she said. "He sent some of his men after me in Matamoros."

"You ought to make a break."

"I can't! I'm watched too close. Please go now, before someone finds you here." Her tone was urgent, pleading. "I don't think Gaffney will harm me, or let anybody else hurt me in any way. Go, Jim, hurry!"

"I'll be back," Hatfield promised. "I'll take you out of here when the time comes, Jean."

SHE motioned him frantically away, and Hatfield ducked and ran for it, as the front door opened and Jean Tremblay turned quickly from that window.

Back at the Sibley tent he was to share with Coram and Servoss, he found them smoking and drinking beside the ruddy embers of a campfire. Burke Coram handed him the bottle and said, "We're moving out in the morning, Jim. Across the Rio Grande and up to Galveston."

"That's good," said Hatfield, sighting through the bottle at the glowing red coals, filled with despair at the thought of leaving Jean Tremblay here in the hands of King Gaffney and this hybrid army of Mexicans and traitors.

But there was no alternative. He had to go to Galveston to save that cargo of arms and ammunition for the Rangers. He had to leave Jean behind, because there wasn't time to engineer an escape. Which meant that he'd have to come back to Valhalla and get her later.

Hatfield smiled somberly and tilted up the bottle. He had to return anyway to kill Pereda and Gaffney. He could take Jean after that chore was done.

They rode out in the morning, twenty-two picked men on strong, fleet horses, and the second night out of Valhalla, they forded the Rio Grande south of Laredo. Jim Hatfield realized once more how easy it was to cross the Border.

A three-hundred mile march lay ahead of them, with five more great rivers to cross before they reached Galveston Island. The force was composed mainly of Americans, with only a half-dozen Mexicans along, not enough to attract suspicion.

Two night after entering Texas, they bivouacked on the bank of the Nueces River. The following evening they scattered and infiltrated into Goliad in pairs, taking a few days break there in the town on the San Antonio River. Ahead of schedule, they had plenty of time to enjoy the saloons, gambling houses and dance halls of the settlement.

Afraid of being recognized there, Hatfield spent most of his time in a hotel room, explaining to the disgusted Coram and Servoss that he was more or less "wanted" in this section, and thought it safer to stay out of sight.

"What if you are wanted, Jim?" growled Burke Coram. "We sure ain't letting anybody take you."

"We don't want any trouble before we hit Galveston, Burke," said Hatfield. "We don't want to have to outrun any posses on the way. I brought a few of Henry DeWitt's books to read, and I don't mind holing up like this."

"Well, Silk and I got to keep circulating around," grumbled Coram, "to keep the rest of them wild-eyed jaspers out of jail."

Silk Servoss grinned. "And you know how much we hate to circulate around those dirty barrooms and low gambling joints, Jim."

"Two more riders supposed to meet us here," Coram said. "They had been scouting Galveston and that vicinity. Come on Silk, let's get movin' before our boys start a jamboree somewhere."

They left Hatfield with his books. It was nice to have leisure time for reading again, yet there were interludes when the Ranger's mind wandered from the printed pages, and he was filled with a desolate fear for Jean Tremblay, back there in the enemy cantonment. And one night in a weird dream he saw Jean's lovely body stretched on that torture rack,

with the Apache Indian working over her while King Gaffney and Chico Pereda looked on, gloating and evil.

On the day of departure from Goliad, most of the men had drifted out of town singly or in small groups, to rendezvous outside, when Jim Hatfield stepped out the back door of the hotel into the stable yard. The blue roan was saddled and ready for him. Coram and Servoss sat their saddles, talking to a third mounted man, apparently one of the scouts who was joining them.

"Come on, Jim, climb aboard," Burke called, spitting an amber stream of tobacco juice into the sunshine.

HATFIELD, saddlebags in his left hand, was walking toward the blue horse when the third man turned in his saddle for a look. Hatfield halted in his tracks, as he saw that scarred beard-stubbled dark face light up with amazed recognition. It was Ace Alvarez, a half-breed outlaw, wanted on a score of charges, ranging from larceny to murder.

"Hey, what the hell's he doing here?" Alvarez cried hoarsely. "He's a—" Alvarez broke off and grabbed at his holster, as Hatfield's right hand flicked into motion.

Hatfield was too far away to reach the man, and there was only one way to check his tongue. Hatfield's gun rose in a swift glimmering arc and burst into roaring flame, the muzzle-light angling upward at the man on horseback. Ace Alvarez stiffened up in his stirrups, half-drawn gun exploding inside the sheath. His buckskin bolted, and Alvarez pitched headlong from the leather into the dirt, lying slack and shapeless with the dust swirling about him.

Coram and Servoss, reining their startled mounts up, eyed Hatfield narrowly, as he swung up onto the blue roan.

"What the hell, Jim?" said Burke Coram. "You're the one that didn't want any trouble."

"An old feud," Hatfield said easily. "It was him or me, boys. We'd sworn to gun one another at first sight."

"He was trying to tell us something, Jim," drawled the lank Servoss.

"He was trying to tell you I was no good," Hatfield said. "I'd say the same thing about him. My word against Alverez', boys. Which would you believe?"

Coram spat at Alvarez' crumpled form. "Let's light a shuck outa here."

"There won't be any pursuit once they identify Alvarez," said Hatfield. "He's wanted all over Texas."

They rode out at a gallop, slowing when Goliad was well behind them, jogging on toward the point of rendezvous.

"You're pretty slick with that shooting iron, Jim," said Coram.

"Have to be, in order to stay alive," Hatfield said.

"Well, we got all the information Ace had to offer," Coram growled. "His pardner, Teke Hyde will be meeting us at the Colorado. Is he in this feud, too?"

Hatfield nodded gloomily. Teke Hyde was another bandit and gunfighter, who knew the Ranger as well as Alvarez had.

"I don't like it, Jim," grumbled Burke Coram. "I don't like it a damn bit."

"You can get rid of me, Burke," said Hatfield mildly. "Just say the word."

"It ain't that easy," Coram said. "When a man joins up with us he sticks and plays the string out—until he dies. We can't afford to turn anybody loose."

"Reckon you're in deeper than I thought," Hatfield murmured.

"If you're in it at all, you're in it deep and all the way," Coram declared flatly.

Coram shifted his broad bulk in the leather. "I don't know—yet. Stay out of sight at the Colorado maybe, and I'll send Hyde on to Valhalla. We'll figure something. Can't have you killing our own men off, Jim."

Burke Coram was angry and suspicious. This was the first breach between them, and they were no longer a close-knit trio. Jim Hatfield realized with sharp regret that the time would come when he'd have to fight Coram and Servoss. After he betrayed them at Galveston, there'd be no quarter on either side. He'd have to kill them, or be killed by them. It was the only way it could end.

They crossed the Guadalupe River and

pushed on in a northeasterly course toward the Colorado.

Hatfield kept away from their camp on the Colorado River, until Teke Hyde had reported in and been sent along southward by Coram.

ANOTHER day's ride brought them to a ford in the Brazos River. On the following afternoon, the 23rd of July, they arrived in scattered bunches at the ferry from the mainland to Galveston Island.

Once across to the town on the island, they filtered by devious ways toward the harbor in the late afternoon. Hatfield was relieved to find that the *Gulf Queen* hadn't docked as yet. He required darkness for what he had to do here.

As the afternoon waned, with lengthening shadows, Hatfield lounged in a little waterfront saloon with two associates named Dillman and Myron, opposite the wharf at which the *Gulf Queen* would tie up. The other men were waiting in various barrooms, restaurants and stores along the levee. The plan was to board and take command of the vessel, and force Captain Carlstrum and the crew to sail directly down the Gulf to Matamoros with the cargo of munitions, meant for the Texas Rangers. Daring and audacious as it seemed, there was no reason why it wouldn't work, unless Jim Hatfield was able to forestall it.

Dusk came and the *Queen* still hadn't

A TALL TEXAS TALE

HIGH FOG

THERE WAS a warm wind coming in off the Gulf and Windy Riley took his hat off and sleeved the sweat off his brow. "Gonna fog up tonight," he said, glancing at the low gray bank of clouds.

"You don't know what fog is here in Texas," said the new hand with the flat face. "I'm from up Seattle way where fog is fog, what I mean! Why, there's times you can't see your own nose, even."

Windy glanced at the smashed nose of the new man but refrained from obvious comment. "We get some pretty good high-hangers down here, though it don't often get as thick as that down on the ground. Like the time the geese got hung up over the ranch. You remember, Bull?"

"Oh, shore," Bull McCoy said off-handedly. "You mean the time they got hung up there in the fog for four straight days and would've starved to death if we hadn't brought 'em down and fed 'em some corn?"

Windy nodded, and the flat-faced one looked suspiciously from one to the other of the old-timers. "How did you get 'em down?" he asked finally.

"Well, we had us a time there," Windy said, "but we solved her at last by nailing together all the ladders we had on the place, including the ones to the haymow. Then we just climbed up and pulled them geese down."

"But how did you ever hold up a ladder of that height?" the new hand wanted to know.

"Wasn't no problem at all, once we got her shoved into that there fog bank," Bull McCoy explained. "She couldn't have fell if she'd wanted to. Trouble is, when that fog lifted she took our ladder right along with her. Why, for a week there we had to use a pole-vault rig to get up into the haymow. But coming from Seattle like you do, I guess it's pretty hard for you to understand just how thick these high Texas fogs can get, eh?"

"Argh!" barked the man with the flat face.

made port, which was all to the good from Hatfield's standpoint. It had to be full dark, for him to break away and get aboard ahead of the raiders, and he'd have to work fast when the ship landed.

It was fortunate that he was known to Captain Carlstrum and some of the sailors. No time could be lost in breaking out the arms and ammunition, cleaning the grease-packed guns, and preparing to repel the attack. It would be a close thing indeed.

CHAPTER V

Guns at Galveston

DARKNESS had settled over the harbor and town when the *Gulf Queen* finally nosed into her berth at the pier.

Hatfield, the tension mounting almost unbearably within him, finished his drink and drawled casually, "Reckon I'll sashay out and look her over, boys."

Myron and Dillman promptly drained their glasses and hitched at their belts. "Reckon we'll tag along with you, Hathaway," drawled Myron, and Jim knew they were under orders from Coram to keep a close watch on him.

They left the saloon and started across the cobbled street toward the docks. Their confederates were not moving. A couple of Rangers, Jordan and Ramsey from Headquarters, were standing on the corner, and Hatfield felt their eyes following him curiously. They would be down from Austin to receive the shipment of firearms and cartridges.

He hoped now to be recognized, whereas he had been living in fear of that ever since leaving Matamoros. It seemed that Jordan and Ramsey may have identified him for glancing back in mid-street, Hatfield saw the Rangers falling in behind them with lengthened strides. With a hand in back of his hip, Hatfield motioned them forward.

The ropes were snubbed fast and the gangplank was out from the *Gulf Queen* as Hatfield and his companions reached the wharf and came abreast of the freighter, with Jordan and Ramsey closing up from the rear. There were waterfront idlers loafing along the pier, but Coram and Servoss and the others hadn't made an appearance.

With an abrupt lightning motion, Jim Hatfield flipped both guns clear and wheeled to cover Myron and Dillman.

"This is as far as you go, boys. Get back to that saloon."

But both men were already reaching, dead-game before those twin muzzles. Ranger Jordan caught and pinned Myron's arms from behind, and Ranger Ramsey chopped his gun barrel down on Dillman's head, dropping him in a senseless heap. At Hatfield's signal, Ramsey turned and gunwhipped Myron flat on the dock.

"Take their guns and come aboard with me, boys," Hatfield said.

"What's going on, Jim?" asked Jordan, as they went up the gangplank. "We thought you were on leave."

"There's a gang from Mexico after this cargo of guns," Hatfield said. "I've been riding with 'em. They'll be charging this ship any minute now."

Captain Carlstrum awaited them on board, surprise and bewilderment on his square, seamed face, but his voice was calm and even.

"Trouble, gentlemen?"

"Plenty, Captain," said Hatfield. "You're going to be attacked. Cast off the ropes and pull in the plank. Break out the munitions in the hold, and arm the crew. Make it fast, Captain. We've got a battle on our hands."

Carlstrum gave his orders, clearly and crisply, and there was instant activity along the deck and down in the hold. Carlstrum went to a speaking tube and delivered instructions to the engine room. He turned back to Hatfield.

"Our Mexican friends, Jim?"

Hatfield nodded. "Straight from Valhalla and Pereda and Gaffney. Can you pull out of here, Captain?"

"It'll take a few minutes to get the engines going again."

Jordan and Ramsey were handing out

the pistols they had acquired from the two renegades on the wharf.

Ramsey said quietly, "Here they come, men."

Hatfield looked shoreward and saw about a score of men, led by Burke Coram and Silk Servoss, running out on the pier with guns swinging in either hand. Fire spurted toward the vessel, as the first shots splintered the night air, and bullets raked the rail and whanged off brasswork.

Crouched along the rail, Captain Carlstrum and his two mates, and Hatfield and the other two Rangers, returned the fire with their hand guns. Red and orange and bluish flames torched back and forth between the ship and the dock, and the thunderous blasting of guns filled the harbor and echoed out over Galveston Bay. Two or three running men went down rolling and sprawling on the wharf, and others scrambled for cover.

THE first mate grunted and swore, falling back with a bullet through his shoulder. The second mate sagged across the rail and hung there on his belly until Hatfield hauled him back onto the deck. Ranger Jordan dropped without a sound, the blood from his creased scalp crimsoning his clean-cut features.

Hatfield and Ramsey and Carlstrum were left to bear the brunt of the assault, with slugs slashing and whipping all around them, showering them with splinters and screeching off metal surfaces. Their guns emptied, they ducked back to reload.

On the firing line again, they found a half-dozen reckless raiders driving in behind blaring guns, close enough to claw at the railing. With muzzle-flashes blinding their eyes and searing their cheeks, Hatfield and Ramsey and Carlstrum thumbed off swift shots, until three of the enemy were down and the other three routed in flight.

The attackers had fallen back temporarily now, and Hatfield observed that someone had brought up their horses. The next assault was a mounted one, sweeping the pier with crashing hoofbeats and blazing guns. It certainly would have carried on board the *Gulf Queen*, if Swede Larssen and Art Loomis and other sailors hadn't swarmed up on deck and gone to work with brand-new Winchesters and Colts. With this added firepower the charge was turned back, fallen horses and riders littering the long wharf, the enemy ranks riddled and decimated.

"That ought to do it," Jim Hatfield said, reloading his guns again. "Your boys got up just in time, Captain."

Carlstrum nodded and went on checking the wounded. The first mate had a clean hole through his shoulder, but the second mate was dead. Ranger Jordan had been knocked out with a scalp wound, but Hatfield quickly ascertained that there was no fracture or serious damage. One crewman had a broken arm, and another had half an ear shot off. It was the assault force that suffered the heavy casualties. They must have lost more than half their number, But Hatfield thought Coram and Servoss had survived the savage combat.

Carlstrum went to the bridge, as the motors started throbbing in the depths of the ship, and soon the *Gulf Queen* was churning slowly out of her berth and away from that bloody death-strewn dock. If the raiders had any idea of trying it again, they relinquished all hope as the freighter moved out into the harbor.

The vessel and the munitions were safe and secure now. The guns and ammunition would go to the Texas Rangers in Austin, where they belonged.

Hatfield was rising from Jordan's side when a shout of warning came to him along the dark deck. Swiveling and drawing with fluid speed, Hatfield saw the squat, ugly Lopez driving at him, knife in hand, from the direction of the passengers' cabins. The Mexican was almost on top of him when Hatfield thumbed his hammer forward. The gun-blast caught Lopez in midair, beating him backward and down, gut-shot and writhing out his life on the boards.

Lead scorched Hatfield's cheek, as a pistol flared from the passageway to the

cabins. Bringing his Colt to bear on this new target, Hatfield recognized the tall, darkly handsome Rivera, as he had expected. Flame lanced loud and bright, the gun lifting hard in Hatfield's big hand, the wallop of the .45 smashing Rivera back on the wall, his proud face stricken with terror and surprise.

Rivera fired once more as he drooped there, straight into the deck in front of his polished boots. Fanning his hammer with cold fury and hatred, Jim Hatfield slammed three more shots into the sleek, graceful Mexican, bouncing Rivera sideward along the wall until he toppled forward on his face, stretched still and lifeless across the corridor.

"Those two still aboard?" Hatfield muttered.

"Sure, they been with us all the time, Jim," said young Art Loomis.

They must've been tied up with that gang, Hatfield mused. But if they were, what was that act Coram and Servoss put on, saving me from them in Matamoros? Probably all prearranged, so Coram and Servoss could sucker me into joining them, and get me south of the Border. But I still can't figure it. They could have killed me a hundred times, if that's what they want.

WELL, there was no use in worrying about it. Jim Hatfield had to go back to Valhalla. He might as well ship out on the *Gulf Queen* to Matamoros again, and hope to reach Valhalla and get Jean Tremblay out of there before Coram and Servoss returned overland. With luck, he could do it. He might have to eliminate Teke Hyde down there, as he had Ace Alvarez in Goliad, but that would be something of a pleasure and surely a worthwhile job.

The chances Hatfield had to take in this game were getting longer and thinner all the time, and going back to Valhalla was really asking for it. Flirting with death, and possibly death by torture. But he couldn't leave Jean Tremblay down there in Mexico, and he had to kill that little Pereda and the giant Gaffney before this was over.

With those two dead, the army would disintegrate and there'd be no attempt to invade Texas.

Once more the *Gulf Queen* was bucking the tide into the broad mouth of the Rio Grande, ploughing upstream toward the harbor of Matamoros,

Jim Hatfield was aboard, and with him young Ranger Ramsay, long and lean, with the face of a boy, a merry smile, and sad, brooding gray eyes. Jordan had been left behind in Galveston with his aching head and the Rangers' shipment of arms. The first mate and his wounded shoulder were also back there on the Island. The second mate, in accordance with a wish once expressed to Carlstrum, had been buried at sea.

There were two new officers on board. Swede Larssen and Art Loomis might have been promoted to fill the vacancies, but they were leaving the ship in Matamoros, to ride to Valhalla with Hatfield and Ramsey. The two sailors were insistent about joining the venture, and with their experience as cowboys and gunhands they might come in handy, Hatfield realized. He was apt to need help in springing Jean Tremblay out of that armed camp, and someone to help him fight off the pursuit. In Ramsey and Loomis and Larssen, he would have three good men with him.

It was none too many. Hatfield had left a message for Captain Bill McDowell, requesting him to dispatch as many Rangers as he could spare to Laredo, at once. He thought he had convinced Roaring Bill that the threat of invasion was truly grave and imminent.

The blue roan had been recovered on the Galveston waterfront, after the broken outlaw band had fled, leaving their dead and dying on the wharf, and Hatfield was bringing the gelding back to Henry DeWitt. He was going to ride Goldy on this next expedition. It would seem wonderful to have the sorrel under him again, although the roan was a fine horse.

When they put in to Matamoros, Hatfield saw a bunch of heavily armed riders waiting near the inland end of the

pier. They were undoubtedly over from Valhalla to meet Coram's crew and the cargo of munitions. Hatfield and Ramsey lingered on board, while Larssen and Loomis helped their 'mates unload. The riders drifted away after learning that neither Coram's detail nor the firearms were on the *Gulf Queen*. Something had gone very wrong up north.

The unloading was finished and the way clear and the farewells said. Hatfield and Ramsay went ashore with Larssen and Loomis, leading the blue and Ramsey's chestnut, and carrying their gear. The customs and immigration officials, generally lax on the Mexican side, held them up for quite a stretch this time.

HATFIELD knew they were expecting the ship to be under the control of Coram and Servoss, and were worried and baffled over what had transpired up in Galveston. But the papers of all four Americans were in order, and the officials finally and grudgingly let them pass.

They went directly to the Harbor Hotel and began preparations for the trip into Mexico. Larssen and Loomis had range clothes in their seabags, but they had to buy carbines and revolvers and shells. DeWitt readily agreed to lend the sailors horses while waxing ironical over the happy restful holiday that Hatfield was having. They were taking an extra saddle horse to pack provisions, and perhaps to serve as a mount for Jean Tremblay, once her escape was affected.

"I won't borrow any more books, Henry," remarked Hatfield. "Reckon there won't be much time for reading on this excursion."

"A vacation to end all vacations," said DeWitt. "A leave of absence that leads to the hospital or the cemetery."

After a few excellent drinks and a bounteous meal, as DeWitt's guests, the four riders set forth in their westerly course up the Rio Grande. A forced march this time, for it was imperative

[*Turn page*]

"BILL'S A GREAT DATE, but he's a square about his hair. He's got all the signs of Dry Scalp! Dull hair that a rake couldn't comb . . . and loose dandruff, too. He needs 'Vaseline' Hair Tonic!"

Hair looks better... scalp feels better... when you check Dry Scalp

NEAT SOLUTION, this 'Vaseline' Hair Tonic! Just a few drops a day check loose dandruff and other annoying signs of Dry Scalp . . . make your hair *naturally* good-looking. Contains no alcohol or other drying ingredients . . . it's economical, too.

Vaseline HAIR TONIC
TRADE MARK ®

Listen to **DR. CHRISTIAN,** starring **JEAN HERSHOLT,** on CBS Wednesday nights.

VASELINE is the registered trade mark of the Chesebrough Mfg. Co., Cons'd

to arrive well ahead of Coram and Servoss and the other survivors of the mission to Galveston.

CHAPTER VI

Return to Valhalla

FIFTY miles out the four riders left the river and struck across arid sunburnt plains toward the mountains around Monterey. The summer heat was terrific in this desertlike land, and they rode sweat-soaked in the hot damp leather, the horses frothed white and salt-rimed.

Stag-horn cactus bloomed brilliantly, the mescal was starred with white flowers, and Spanish bayonet wore its white blossoms bravely in the heat. They traversed alkali flats scattered with squat greasewood shrubs, creosote brush and prickly pear. The sandy dunes were spiked with needle-spined chollas and catclaw, pitahaya columns and tall bladed yucca, spread-armed sahuaro cactus and graceful fountainlike clusters of ocotillo.

A hundred scorching miles of fantastic and savage beauty, and they were climbing and circling in the mountains of Monterey, dropping to the foothills that overlooked the military post of Valhalla. The hills rose within a couple of hundred yards of the camp. There they settled down to wait for darkness in a grove of ironwood and paloverde.

Jim Hatfield scanned the encampment with his binoculars, and pointed out to the others the adobe in which Jean Tremblay was a captive. It stood on the near edge of that city of tents, shacks, storehouses, and corrals. With only one guard to dispose of, it shouldn't be too difficult to get Jean out of that adobe and into the hills, under the covering rifles of Ramsey and Larssen and Loomis.

Hatfield showed them the log structure that was headquarters, and they all had a good look at little Pereda and big Gaffney and other officers, through the field-glasses. As far as Hatfield could tell, the remnants of the Coram-Servoss detachment had not returned yet. It was a long hard ride back from Galveston, and the raiders had been badly mauled in that dockside battle.

But Hatfield couldn't waste any time, or take any chance of Coram and Servoss coming back to catch him in Valhalla. The memory of the Apaches' torture chamber still haunted him. He'd have to let Pereda and Gaffney live a while longer, and concentrate solely on the rescue of Jean Tremblay.

Hatfield had tentatively planned to report in to headquarters here, with some kind of a story about getting separated from the others after the disastrous rout at Galveston Bay, but he decided to discard this idea as too risky. It would be stretching his luck altogether too far, just as it would be to try and kill Gaffney and Pereda within the camp.

Now that the shipment of arms was lost to the Mexicans, he doubted that there would be any attempt to invade Texas. Still, Pereda was a madman, Gaffney was hungry for power and revenge, and they probably had five hundred men, who were fully armed, well-mounted, and thoroughly equipped for a campaign.

With that force they could overrun and take Laredo, and ravage the countryside for a hundred miles around, before they were put down.

But the primary objective at present was to free Jean Tremblay. If Gaffney hadn't had his way with the girl as yet, he would be getting highly impatient by this time. Hatfield shuddered to think of that sweet, delicate girl in the brutal grasp of the giant Gaffney.

In the darkness before moonrise, it would be simple enough for Hatfield to slip into the enemy camp. There was little effort made to patrol the entire perimeter, and Hatfield had observed on his previous visit that the few widely-spaced outguards were usually half-drunk and drowsing at their posts.

Leaving Swede Larssen and Art Loomis on that first height of land, with their rifles ready and the horses saddled, Hat-

field and Ramsey crept forward in the blackness toward the vast fire-stained area of the campgrounds. They moved with exceeding caution, silent as prowling Indians, flitting through the mesquite and manzanita, from tree to tree and rock to rock. They carried Winchesters and wore their two Colts in low-slung sheaths thonged to their legs.

THE last hundred yards was open level plain, treeless and bare except for fringes of sage and chaparral and a few boulders. Ramsey took his position in a clump of rocks and levered a shell into the chamber of his carbine.

"Be careful in there, Jim," he whispered.

"You be ready to pour it on 'em, Ram," said Hatfield, moving on alone toward the humming activity and garish firelight of the great garrison.

There was a sentry at the entrance of the trim neat adobe structure. Apparently Jean was still held there. Moving without a sound, Hatfield made his entry into the camp, unobserved and circled unchallenged to the rear of the outlying house, the same window he had sought before.

Jean was alone inside, looking drawn and weary and utterly dejected. Gaffney must have been giving her a rough time, Hatfield reflected, his teeth grating. She rose quickly and darted to the window, and her greeting was much different than on the previous occasion.

"Oh, Jim, Jim!" she cried softly. "Thank God you're here! I've got to get away. Please take me out of here!"

"Sure," he said, relieved to find her wearing riding breeches. "Grab a hat and jacket." The windows were too small to permit the passage of a body, even one as slender as the girl's. "Get ready. I'll take care of the guard."

Hatfield rolled a cigarette, placed it in his mouth, and walked around to the front of the adobe, rifle over his shoulder. The sentry leveled his carbine, barking. "Halt right there! What you doing out here, man?" He looked like a breed of many mixed bloods, including Indian, Mexican, and probably many others.

"I've come to relieve you, *amigo*," drawled Hatfield.

"It ain't time yet. Get along, man. You ain't supposed to come near this house. The King'll break your back!"

"I was sent to replace you, soldier," Hatfield said coolly. "Are you fool enough to refuse relief?" He lounged lazily forward. "Got a match, *amigo*?"

The guard sighed, lowering his rifle and fumbling in his pockets. Then suspicion flared up, and he started to train the rifle on the Ranger again. Hatfield lunged swiftly and drove the steelshod butt of the Winchester against the man's forehead with crushing power. The sentry gasped and fell backward, sprawling senseless on the earth. Hatfield took his rifle and revolver, and opened the cabin door, handing them to Jean as she emerged.

Quickly they headed into the outer darkness, but someone had spotted them and was shouting, "Hey, you! Where the hell you think you're going? Hold up or I'll plug you!"

Jim Hatfield whirled and fired the carbine from his hip, the orange flame spearing out at the speaker, the heavy bullet knocking the man over backward.

"Run for it, Jean!" cried Hatfield, and they started running across the dark plain, tripping and stumbling through the sage and creosote.

Guns hammered away behind them, the lead singing overhead or spraying them with sand and stone fragments. Hatfield stayed a little behind, to keep his big rangy frame between the girl and the enemy rifles, steering her at a slight angle to give Ramsey a clear field of fire.

Ramsey cut loose with his Winchester as the pursuit started on foot. There were screams and curses from the rear as running men went down, tumbling and kicking in the chaparral. Hatfield turned and fired three shots back, as fast as he could trigger and lever the carbine, and along with Ramsey's accurate shooting it slowed and turned back the pursuers, momentarily at least. But hoofbeats sounded from within the camp, and

horsemen were coming out to take up the chase.

Panting hard, Jean and Hatfield reached Ramsey's position, and paused behind the boulders to empty and then reload their rifles. From the ridge top in the background, Larssen and Loomis were firing steadily, spilling riders from the saddle and dropping horses in the weltering dust and smoke. Muzzle-lights winked all along the rim of the encampment, and bullets ricocheted, howling off the rocks.

WITH the rag-tag cavalry charge checked temporarily, the girl and the two Rangers went on toward the hills, sheltered now by trees, boulders, and hummocks of mescal and waxy-leafed mesquite.

The rifles of Larssen and Loomis were booming away constantly, but halfway to the ridge Hatfield and Ramsey had to stop and help the two sailors break up and beat back the mounted pursuit. Their withering scourging rifle fire did it, blasting the outlaw cavalry into a chaos of confusion and panic, downing horses and men and sending riderless mounts galloping off in all directions.

The moon was rising now, mellow and golden above the jagged mountains. When they reached the bottom of the ridge, Jean Tremblay was exhausted and sobbing for breath. The Rangers took an arm on either side and helped her up the slope.

Swede Larssen and Art Loomis were still pouring fire into the enemy ranks. Slugs went on shredding leaves, snapping twigs, and slashing through branches along the ridge-side. It was a miracle that none of them had been hit, in all that deadly hail.

From the crest they emptied their rifles once more to keep the Mexican pursuit at bay, reloaded, and dropped down the far side of the ridge to the horses. Mounting at once, they pulled out of there on the gallop, taking a route that Hatfield had mapped out that afternoon, threading and climbing higher into the hills. Their chances of getting away were good now. Having suffered severely under the superb marksmanship of the Americans, the enemy wouldn't be too anxious to follow them into this mountain wilderness.

"They'll expect us to cut back toward the Rio Grande," Jim Hatfield said thoughtfully. "Probably string a cordon across the country to cut us off from the north. If we have to, we'll take a pass through this range and drop down into Monterey. They'll never look for us there."

"Gaffney and Pereda are leaving soon," Jean Tremblay said. "To establish another camp up near the Border, a jumping-off place opposite Laredo."

"Then they're going through with the invasion, even if they didn't get the guns and ammunition from Galveston?" Hatfield murmured.

"They're crazy," the girl said, shivering in her saddle. "They'd go through with it, Jim, if they had to go barehanded!"

"We can't hang around long down here then," Hatfield said. "I sure hope Bill McDowell sent those Rangers I asked for to Laredo."

"There aren't enough Rangers in all of Texas to stop Pereda and Gaffney," protested Jean, with a note of despair.

Hatfield smiled gravely. "We'll see about that. Did they—did Gaffney—get rough with you?"

"No, but he was on the verge of it," Jean said. "He was running out of patience. You got back just in time, Jim."

"I'm sure glad of that," Jim Hatfield said softly.

They followed a shallow stream for a mile or so, riding in the water to leave no trace of hoofprints, and coming out on a broad stone escarpment, which would reveal no tracks. There were no sounds of pursuit, as they mounted ever higher into the wild broken uplands, but the way north would be barred for the next few days, without question. Their best bet, Hatfield concluded, was to hide out in Monterey, until the Mexican army relaxed vigilance in their direction, and went on preparing for the invasion of Texas.

On the ride in, Hatfield had sighted a

pass that looked as if it led westward all the way through the mountains, and he was pointing for that break in the heights now. The moon, aloft and silvery by this time, was like a great searchlight illuminating their way . . . .

They reached Monterey after a nonstop trek in the mountains and it was there, during the next two days, that Ranger Hatfield decided he was in love with red-haired, green-eyed Jean Tremblay. It both pleased, and troubled him deeply. He had thought he was immune, tried to keep himself aloof and isolated, aware that a man in his business had little or no right to love and marriage.

A man who faced death day after day, the year around, he believed should stay single, free and unencumbered. It wasn't fair to inflict all that fear, dread and worry on any woman. But if love really comes and strikes to the heart, what defense is there against it?

HE THOUGHT of other girls he might have fallen in love with, but had not, although he had been attracted. Dolores Cristobal of San Antonio. Tess Hiller on the old Chisholm Trail. Gypsy Carvel at Corpus Christi. And all the rest, to whom Hatfield had responded as a friend and big brother, rather than a lover.

Why should it be so different with this one? Was it the girl herself, or the romantic setting, or some strange alchemy in Jim Hatfield?

Two days and two nights in the Castile House and, as Art Loomis remarked, they were getting tired of Mexican cooking, frijoles and enchiladas and chili. But there was a walled patio behind the hotel, where a fountain tinkled and scarlet poinsettias flamed, purple wisteria draped the adobe, and nightingales and mocking birds sang from the magnolias and crepe myrtles, festooned with Spanish moss. In the distance sounded slow, sad Latin music, and the chiming of bells from the mission towers. Jean Tremblay and Jim Hatfield spent most of their time amidst that serene perfumed beauty. It was an idyllic spot for love to flower and flourish.

But danger and duty beckoned in the north, and on the third morning they made ready to leave Monterey and ride northward to the Rio Grande and Laredo.

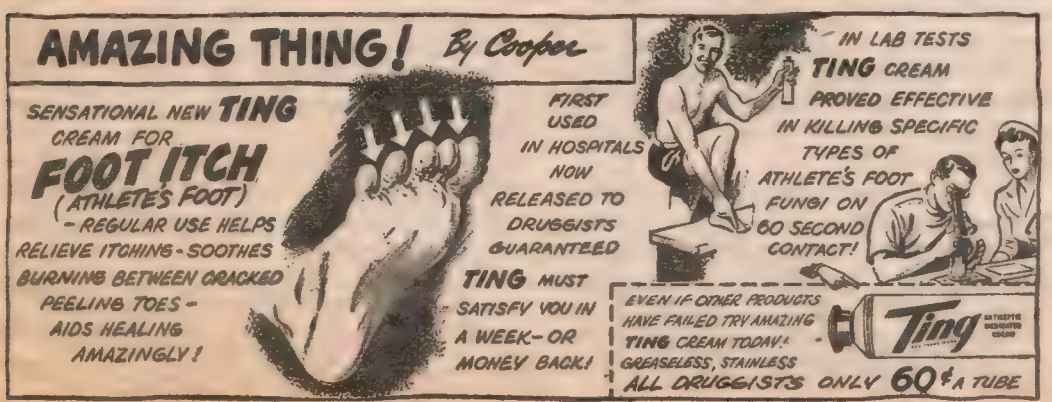
CHAPTER VII

War in Monterey

JIM HATFIELD and Jean Tremblay took a final stroll in the patio while the boys were saddling up and packing the horses. Man and girl stood warmly embraced under the golden fluffballs of a gleaming opoponax tree.

The girl's head was as bright as the blazing azaleas and camellias. A green parrot chattered in a palmetto, and a thrush lilted from a yellow jasmine. The

[*Turn page*]


AMAZING THING! By Cooper
SENSATIONAL NEW TING CREAM FOR FOOT ITCH (ATHLETE'S FOOT)
- REGULAR USE HELPS RELIEVE ITCHING - SOOTHES BURNING BETWEEN CRACKED PEELING TOES - AIDS HEALING AMAZINGLY!
FIRST USED IN HOSPITALS NOW RELEASED TO DRUGGISTS GUARANTEED
TING MUST SATISFY YOU IN A WEEK - OR MONEY BACK!
IN LAB TESTS TING CREAM PROVED EFFECTIVE IN KILLING SPECIFIC TYPES OF ATHLETE'S FOOT FUNGI ON 60 SECOND CONTACT!
EVEN IF OTHER PRODUCTS HAVE FAILED TRY AMAZING TING CREAM TODAY! GREASELESS, STAINLESS
Ting
ALL DRUGGISTS ONLY 60¢ A TUBE

fountain splashed musically, and faraway bells tolled with a mournful sound. The sunlit morning was filled with vivid colors and fragrant scents, bird song and mission bells, and love lyrics strummed plaintively on guitars.

They finally went through a gate into the stable yard, where the others were waiting with the horses ready to travel. Art Loomis handed Jean into the saddle, grinning at her with shy fondness, while Swede Larssen held the horse's head, and the lean, lanky Ramsey watched solicitously. She was friendly, pleasant, and gracious to all of them, and a great favorite. A man like Jim Hatfield deserved the best, and in Jean Tremblay the boys believed he had found that.

There had been no evidence of pursuit here, no sign of soldiers from Valhalla. In Monterey, the tough, ragged army of Pereda and Gaffney seemed remote and somewhat ridiculous, yet Hatfield wasn't underestimating that motley horde of cutthroats, bandits and killers.

They cantered out of the livery yard and turned north in the street, four fine big men and a lovely lady on splendid horses, easy but alert in their saddles, carbines booted and gunbelts hitched higher than usual for mounted draws, in case they were necessary. Citizens in gay striped serapes and peaked sombreros, and dark-eyed senoritas in gaudy shawls, turned to watch the five riders.

The men watched the red-haired girl astride the sleek black gelding, and the great golden stallion ridden by the big *caballero*. The women divided their attention between Jim Hatfield and his magnificent sorrel, and the other three men. Hatfield was the largest and most striking figure, but these dark Mexican girls found the blondness of Larssen and the tawny fairness of Ramsey and Loomis attractive also.

The four riders were halfway out the main street when the ornate batwing doors of a *cantina* swung open, on the left side of the thoroughfare, and Burke Coram and Silk Servoss swaggered out with four other men at their heels. Myron and Dillman, whom Hatfield had last seen unconscious on the pier at Galveston, and two Mex riders who were named Garcia and Veja.

Mutual surprise gripped them all. Coram and his crew fanned out along the plank sidewalk and stared at the horsemen in mid-street, who swung their mounts around and gazed back at the men on foot. A hushed tension fell over the scene, and people hurriedly withdrew from the vicinity.

"Ride on, Jean," Hatfield said tightly. "I don't want you hit."

Jean shook her coppery head, but Hatfield slapped her black horse's rump and sent him dancing along the street. His green eyes turned to cold stormy gray, as they swerved back to the six renegades spread in front of the saloon.

"Why aren't you in camp, boys?" he inquired.

Burke Coram shrugged his broad, heavy shoulders and spat tobacco juice. "Maybe we want you dead before we report to Chico and the King. You and your friends, Jim Hatfield. That'd take some of the sting out of that deal you pulled in Galveston Bay."

A faint smile touched the thin patrician face of Silk Servoss. "We lost a lot of men there, Jim. You did quite a job on us, boy."

"Should've known when you shot Alvarez in Goliad," growled Coram. "Or when you put the 'Pache's knife into that Border Patrol man who was on the rack. But we kinda took to you, Jim. We kinda liked you."

"Too bad it has to end this way," Hatfield said. "Why don't you let us ride out of here in peace? Why don't you break with that rabble before it's too late, boys? Before you actually go to war against your own country, your own kind of people?"

"Too late, already," drawled Servoss. "We're already at war. And we can't let you ride out. Not after what you did to us at Galveston."

"You don't belong with that Border scum," Hatfield said. "You're too good men to waste your lives for that maniac of a Pereda."

BURKE CORAM shook his head, munching his chew slowly. "You got the King's girl there, Jim. The King'll forgive us for falling down at Galveston, if we bring him back his woman. We got to think of ourselves. You think you can fight a whole army. But we know we can't."

"You'll never get anywhere in Texas. You know that."

"What's going to stop us?" drawled Servoss. "A half-dozen Rangers and maybe twenty Border Patrol men? You and your pardners won't even be there, you know."

Jim Hatfield sighed. "Well, if it's got to be war here, let's get it started."

"We're six to four, Jim," reminded Burke Coram. "You'd be smart to surrender."

Hatfield laughed with quiet disdain. "And land in the Indian's torture chamber? No thanks, Burke. We'll risk the odds right here."

Throwing himself out of the saddle, the Ranger sent Goldy along after Jean Tremblay, not wanting the sorrel killed in this free-for-all shooting match. The enemy went into action before Hatfield's companions could dismount, but his hands streaked into his famed double draw, and his matched .Colts were clear and flaring ahead of all the rest.

Gun flames lashed to and fro across the wide avenue, and roaring concussions beat through the sun-bright air. Bullets chewed at adobe and wood, shattered window glass and raked up long streamers of dust. The shriek of a horse rose above the gunblasts and the horrified cries of women.

Art Loomis was halfway out of the saddle when his mount bolted wildly, with Art clinging to the horn, one foot in the stirrup, the other leg dangling free on the same side. Ramsey's chestnut reared and went down, trumpeting in anguish and threshing the dirt. The tall young Ranger sprang clear and crouched behind his horse, guns ablaze in both fists. Swede Larssen, pony reined tight and prancing, was firing from the saddle.

Burke Coram and Silk Servoss had targeted on Hatfield, their slugs whipping so close that Jim felt the searing suction of lead, but he had drilled his own shots home solidly. The slim Servoss was driven back against the adobe wall of the *cantina*, still on his feet and shooting. The bulky Coram teetered forward, caught a hitch-rail with his left hand, and went on firing with his right.

Dillman was down writhing on the slat sidewalk, and Garcia sat huddled and bleeding at the base of an awning post, striving in vain to raise the pistols that had grown too heavy for his twitching arms. The odds were evened up at four to four. Even though Loomis was momentarily out of the fight, Hatfield's party held a fleeting advantage because Coram and Servoss were hard hit.

Ramsey and Larssen were swapping shots with Myron and Veja, while Hatfield went on dueling with Servoss and Coram. Wounded as they were, those two went on slashing their slugs so near to the Ranger that he felt the hot lead tug at his clothing and scorch his skin.

Then Swede Larssen's mount began to buck like a wild bronc, and the Swede was temporarily out of the battle, fighting the horse in the boiling dust. It looked bad for Hatfield and Ramsey, left alone under the blistering enemy fire.

But Art Loomis had finally turned his bay and was charging back into action at a mad gallop, driving straight at the men before that saloon, reins in teeth and guns flaming in either hand. He cut Veja down in a twirling dying spin that ended in the ditch. Then renegade bullets caught Loomis and ripped him out of leather, back over his horse's rump to bounce, loose and riddled, in the gravel. The bay raced on with the empty saddle, and Loomis lay slack and still in the sunny street.

By now Jim Hatfield had some more .45 slugs in Servoss and Coram, smashing Silk down full length at the foot of the adobe façade, and leaving Burke Coram's heavy hulk draped head down over that hitching-rack, gun-barrels dragging in the dirt.

SWEDE LARSSEN leaped off his bucking bronc when Loomis fell, and came running back into the combat, blond head shining in the sun, teeth bared in a snarl of fury. Laying his shots on the dark, evil Myron, who had blasted Loomis from the saddle, Larssen lashed Myron back into the ornamental swing-doors and dropped him in the entrance of the *cantina*, hard hit and dying.

Garcia had got back into the conflict, shooting from a seated position, back propped against that awning upright. Ranger Ramsey, firing across the dead body of his chestnut, stilled Garcia's weapons with two swift shots that tore the Mexican off the post and left him twisted face-down in the alley.

It was all over then, the gunfire echoing and fading away, the reeking powdersmoke fouling the sunlit air, and pungent dust settling slowly in the strange empty silence.

Ramsey rose from his dead horse, and Swede Larssen ran to the slender, motionless figure of Art Loomis. Walking forward in measured strides, Jim Hatfield reloaded his Colts and stood staring at the bloody scattered bodies of the dead outlaws. Burke Coram hanging on the hitch-rail, Veja in the gutter. Silk Servoss stretched in front of the saloon. Dillman spread-eagled on the board walk. Myron's booted legs sticking out under the batwing doors. Garcia in the mouth of the alley, face in the sandy soil.

Jean Tremblay came riding back, green eyes dilated and fine features frozen with horror. Larssen stood over Loomis, shaking his head and crying, unashamed. Hatfield whistled up Goldy, and they lifted Loomis's slim dead form across the sorrel's back. Ramsey had retrieved Loomis' bay horse, and Larssen went to catch his own mount, which was standing calmly now.

The street was empty except for them. Mexicans peered from doorways and windows, but there was no law in sight and nobody moved out to stop the Americans. Mounted again, they rode out the long street in a northerly direction, guns in hand and keen slitted eyes sweeping both sides of the thoroughfare. The shock of battle was still on them, and no one felt like talking.

Silent and stunned in their saddles, they passed through the outskirts and left Monterey behind in the morning sunshine, four riders where there had been five.

The forenoon, starting in beauty in a perfumed patio, had ended in wholesale carnage and slaughter.

Well out of town they buried Art Loomis on a cedar knoll, marking and cairning the grave with stones. Larssen said Art came from a good family in Natchez On-the-Hill, but Art had always been a rover and a wild one. They had been close comrades for years, and the Swede was heartbroken, sunken in desolation and lonely despair. They were all saddened by the death of Loomis. He had been such a merry, friendly boy, cheerful, smiling and pleasant, with his wavy brown hair and twinkling brown eyes.

They rode on into the north, avoiding main roads and settlements, dodging and hiding from the enemy patrols that now were out scouring the countryside. Their progress was slow, and never free from danger and fear. Only the sheer instincts of Hatfield enabled them to elude the scouting parties from Valhalla. With all that running and skulking and holing up, it took them five days to cover that hundred miles and approach the Rio Grande near Laredo.

Unseen, they passed a company of about two hundred Mexicans on the march northward, and found the new camp which had been established by King Gaffney and Chico Pereda. It was manned by another hundred men, mostly Americans. There'd be at least five hundred in that outlaw army when the ragged soldiers struck at the Border and Laredo, Hatfield estimated. Perhaps even more.

He'd have to rouse and rally all the fighting men available on the American side of the river. They'd still be outnumbered badly, but have some chance of holding Laredo and throwing the in-

vaders back across the Rio Grande.

HALF-STARVED, trail-worn and tired to the bone, the four riders forded the river on the fifth night out of Monterey, and plodded wearily on toward the lights of Laredo, back on home soil once more.

After some good wholesale American meals and a couple of days' rest, the three men and the horses were fully restored, but Jean Tremblay was still in a semi-exhausted state from the ordeal.

Jim Hatfield was disappointed to find that no reinforcements had arrived from Austin. There was only one other Ranger in Laredo—tall, fair-haired Milt Travers, whom Hatfield had once rescued from an outlaw stronghold in the mountains above the San Saba River. And a halfdozen members of the Border Patrol.

They listened patiently while Hatfield told them about the impending invasion and the urgent need of raising an armed force to meet and repel it. But only Milt Travers seemed to believe him and recognize the real peril.

CHAPTER VIII

Blue Mesa Rendezvous

RANGERS Ramsey and Travers were designated to recruit a force of fighting men in the area, while Hatfield and Larssen recrossed the Rio Grande and scouted the Mexicans' Border camp, in hopes of learning exactly when and where the enemy thrust would come.

Neither of these endeavors met with any large measure of success. Ramsey and Travers had difficulty in convincing the Texans of the true menace that threatened them. Hatfield and Larssen were able to observe the garrison from the high rimrock of Blue Mesa, but they

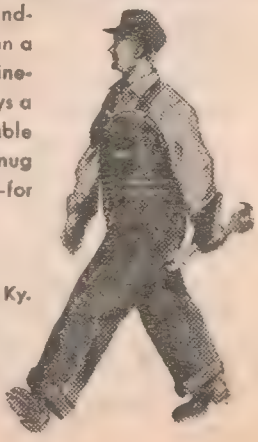
[*Turn page*]

BUT THE WISE BUYER ALWAYS PUTS HIS CHIPS ON...

Carhartt MASTER CLOTH Overalls

Whether you're wrestling a farm tractor or tooling a truck . . . handling the Johnson bar in the cab of a streamliner, grease monkey in a round house, cow hand at the round-up, dairyman, painter, lineman, construction worker or mechanic you'll find your work always a mite easier in easy fitting, full cut Carhartt Master Cloth washable work clothes. And for the youngsters—Carhartt offers its snug fitting, heavy weight, 11 oz. Western styled Round-Up Pants—for work or play. *For price sake . . . insist on Carhartt's.*

HAMILTON CARHARTT OVERALL CO.
Detroit 16, Mich.; Atlanta, Ga.; Dallas, Tex.; Carhartt Park, Irving, Ky.



Carhartt Round-Up Pants

UNION MADE CARHARTT'S

Carhartt Bib Overalls

failed to capture any Mexican scout who might be made to reveal the plans of Chico Pereda and King Gaffney.

Those two "generals" were in command at this advanced post, and the gunman, Teke Hyde, friend of the late Ace Alvarez, was one of their staff officers. With his field-glasses Hatfield picked out other notorious bandits and killers in the encampment, including Jeeter Jethro and Tyle Capott, Monk Mercedes, Pecos Sanchez and Cactus Bruton. A rare assortment of ruthless murderous villains.

Back in Laredo, Hatfield dropped into the Paradise Saloon while Swede Larssen went on to stable their horses. Scanning the smoky, crowded room, Hatfield's green eyes lighted up with pleasure as they fell upon two familiar figures at the long bar. There was no mistaking the little man with the red hair and beard and the bright blue eyes. Red Bouchard, whom the Ranger had found living like a hermit in the Indian Nations of Oklahoma, a man known as Red Bush to the Osages.

Bouchard had joined Hatfield in saving the Amidon trail herd on the old Chisholm Trace. And later, after meeting Jim in the Bella Union at San Antonio, Bouchard had gone along on the Government's quest for the lost silver mine of Cerro del Almagre, at the head of the San Saba.

His companion now was Fox Edley, a tough, wiry, bowlegged former badman and gunfighter, who had accompanied them on that latter mission into the Lipan country. Hatfield was delighted to see them both.

Sidling close, he said, "Seems like I always find you in a barroom, Red. Don't you ever frequent anything but saloons?"

Bouchard whirled with a profane whoop, embracing and mauling the big Ranger, cursing him with fluent fondness. Hatfield reached past him and shook hands with the grinning, tobacco-chewing Fox Edley. They hauled Jim up to the bar and poured him a king-sized drink.

"What brings you boys here?" asked Hatfield, after the initial excitement subsided somewhat.

"Heard there was apt to be trouble on the Border," Red Bouchard said, smiling through his fiery whiskers. "We just naturally gravitate towards trouble, Jim. And besides, we kinda figured on bumping into you down this way, seeing as you and trouble ain't exactly strangers. Milt Travers told us you'd be coming along maybe."

"Reckon that's about it, Jim," drawled Fox Edley, his bleached eyes glinting merrily. "I ain't been able to shake this red-whiskered old coot since we got back from that jaunt to the San Saba. Every time we get set in a decent job, Red up and takes off and drags me with him."

"He hibernated too long in the Oklahoma hills, Fox," said Hatfield. "All hermits are crazy, and Red's no exception."

Bouchard shook his head sadly. "To be funny you got to have some wit, which you lads sorely lack. About this Mex trouble, Jim? Is it or ain't it a false alarm? Life's been mighty dull lately, tromping around with this ignorant bronc-peeler here."

"It's real enough, boys," Hatfield said gravely, and sketched the situation for them.

"Glory be!" exulted Red Bouchard. "We come in time to save Texas, Fox, and do some more of the Rangers' dirty work for 'em. They get paid and delegate the work to us common civilians."

Hatfield grinned. "The Government paid you well on that last expedition, Red."

"Maybe you think I didn't earn it?" Bouchard said. "Killed so many Lipans and renegade Mexes and bandits up there the San Saba's been running red ever since."

HATFIELD laughed and clouted the little man on the back. "Come on over to the Border Hotel and have some supper, boys. Red-headed girl there I want you to meet."

Bouchard snorted. "Always tangled up with gals, but can't get none of 'em to marry him, Fox. What's wrong with you, Hatfield?"

"I don't know, Red," said Hatfield.

"Guess I'm not the romantic type or something."

They met Swede Larssen at the entrance of the Paradise. Hatfield introduced them, and Bouchard insisted on returning to the bar and buying the Swede a couple of drinks. When they finally got to the Border Hotel, Jean Tremblay was waiting with the two tall young Rangers, Ramsey and Milt Travers.

Bouchard and Edley were presented to Jean and Ramsey, and they all adjourned to the dining room for supper. It was a pleasant meal with Bouchard in his best form, and Edley and Travers leading the red-bearded veteran on, to the amusement of the others.

Afterward, Jean and Hatfield sauntered away on the hotel gallery, leaving the men with their cigars.

"I like your friends, Jim," said the girl. Hatfield nodded, in a pleased manner, and she went on, "There's only one way to get the information you need. I'll go back to Gaffney."

"No," Hatfield said flatly. "That wouldn't be safe—or smart. He'd have no pity on you this time, Jean."

"I can handle King," she said. "He'll be so wrapped up in military strategy and tactics, he won't bother with me. You've got to let me go. We haven't got a chance, unless we know when they're coming and where they're going to cross the Rio Grande."

Hatfield debated the matter in somber silence. What Jean said was true enough. They had to learn the time and the point of the enemy attack, or Laredo would fall and the surrounding territory be subjected to terrorism. But he couldn't let Jean Tremblay sacrifice herself, not even for Texas and the United States.

"No, I can't let you do it, Jean," he said finally. "We'll find some other way."

"There isn't any other way, Jim," she insisted. "I'll be safe enough. King Gaffney's so much in love with me, I can make him believe anything. I'm not boasting, because I'm not proud of it—not since I've found out what he's really like. But the fact remains. I'll convince him I was carried away from Valhalla against my will. There's no one left from the Coram party to brand me a liar."

"No, Jean, you aren't going back there."

"Please be sensible, Jim! I'll ride down tonight. Tomorrow night around nine o'clock, I'll be on top of Blue Mesa with the answers you want. If I can't make it myself, there are men I can send. Men who'll do anything I ask them to, in spite of King Gaffney."

"It's still no, Jean," sighed Hatfield. "I won't let you go. Forget all about it now."

"All right." Jean stood on tiptoes and locked her arms around his neck, pulling his dark head down and herself up, until their lips met and fused in sweet clinging rapture.

"I'm still tired, Jim," when she released herself. "I'm going to bed early."

She went into the lobby and up the stairs.

Returning to the others, Hatfield told them what Jean had volunteered to do.

"You always get pretty good gals, Jim," said Red Bouchard. "It's purely a shame that none of 'em will ever marry you, son."

But in the morning Jean Tremblay was missing, and there was a note for Hatfield. It read:

> Sorry, Jim, but I've got to go. It's the only chance we have. Please don't worry about me. King wants to marry me. He won't harm me, or let anyone else hurt me. Be on Blue Mesa at 9 o'clock, as I told you, to receive the information you need. I'll try to meet you there myself, and ride back with you. God bless you and love you, as I do.

THEY all wanted to make the ride to Blue Mesa, but it was decided to leave Rangers Ramsey and Milt Travers behind while Hatfield crossed the Rio Grande with Bouchard and Edley and Larssen. If anything went wrong down there below the Border, it would be well to have at least two men with Ranger authority left in Laredo.

At eight o'clock on the following evening, Hatfield and his three comrades reached the high broad tabletop of Blue Mesa, and led their horses forward through tarragon and golden gilia and

ironwood trees toward the southern rim that overlooked the enemy garrison.

A yellow sickle moon hung tilted in the star-dazzled heavens. Horned owls hooted weirdly, and night-hawks cried out as they hunted in the darkness. The howl of wolves and yapping of coyotes came from a distance. Gophers scurried across the plateau, and jack-rabbits hopped through the sage and bunchgrass. Fireflies streaked the air with greenish light.

At nine o'clock they were still waiting, afraid that something had happened to Jean Tremblay. Nine-thirty came without any sign of the girl. Gaffney wouldn't let her out of his sight, Hatfield thought bitterly. Gaffney was probably forcing his attentions upon Jean at this very minute.

The picture of that turned Hatfield's stomach and clutched at his throat. A lone woman in that vile nest of ravenous beasts. Once Gaffney was through with Jean he'd turn her over to Chico Pereda, and maybe the Apache. Or throw her broken loveliness to the rank-and-file of his troops.

At ten o'clock, there was a flicker of movement in a mesquite thicket that was surrounded by rock chimneys and jumbled boulders. A black horse with a white-blazed face and white-stockinged forelegs. Jean Tremblay's horse, borrowed from the stable of Henry DeWitt.

The waiting men mounted and moved forward at a walk in the eerie light of the crescent moon and myriad stars. Midway they paused and listened, keening the night air. Goldy neighed, as if in question or challenge. The black answered, but there was no other response.

Hatfield led them on, sensing something wrong but not comprehending what. If there was any danger Jean would warn them away. Certainly she wouldn't lure them into a trap. But the black horse and rider were fading back into the mesquite, as they drew nearer.

They advanced into the small clearing encircled with brush and stone pillars and rock heaps. Hatfield felt a cold prickle along his spine, and a queer creeping sensation in his scalp.

He was reaching for his gun, when that voice rang out, "Get your hands up and don't move! There's a dozen guns covering you on all sides!"

They reined up and lifted their arms. Men with rifles and revolvers seemed to rise out of the earth all around them. Jean had vanished—if it had been Jean on the black. Hands caught at their bridles, snatched off their gunbelts and carbines, yanked the riders roughly from saddle.

The horses were led away, but Goldy broke loose, snorting, plunging and kicking, scattering the renegades in panic. The sorrel fled, and the other three horses raced after him. A rifle rose into line, but someone knocked the barrel down.

Chico Pereda and King Gaffney were there, gloating over the prisoners, and Teke Hyde stood with a great bullwhip coiled in his hand. Cadaverous Jeeter Jethro and plump, moon-faced Tyle Capott were on the scene, along with sly, wizened Monk Mercedes, big Cactus Bruton, and the warped, vicious Pecos Sanchez. There were others Hatfield didn't know.

Two men grasped Hatfield's arms and dragged him before Gaffney and Pereda. It was useless to struggle, with gun muzzles gaping everywhere.

"We meet again, Ranger," said King Gaffney, from his great height. Hatfield stood well over six feet, but the King towered above him. "You killed Ace Alvarez. You killed Rivera and Lopez in Galveston. You killed Coram and Servoss and their men in Monterey. And no telling how many others. Now it's our turn." Gaffney smashed a sledge-hammer fist into Hatfield's face. "Strip him to the waist and tie him to a tree! The same with the others."

CHICO PEREDA complained, "I wish the Apache was here with his knife, but at least we have the whips."

"If they live through this, we'll send Apache up," Gaffney said.

"Let the other three go," Hatfield said. "They've done nothing to hurt you. Take me and turn them loose."

"Shut up!" Gaffney said, slugging him again.

Naked to the belt, Hatfield was forced against a tree and bound fast, arms about the trunk, with wrists tied on the far side, ankles thonged together at the base.

"He's mine," Teke Hyde said. "For Ace Alvarez."

"Don't leave any skin on his back," advised Chico Pereda, hooded eyes bulging, shining like black liquid fire.

"Did you think a woman would leave me for *you?*" demanded Gaffney, with supreme scorn. "Cut 'em to ribbons, men, and leave 'em for the mosquitos and flies and buzzards!"

Face hard against the rough bark, Hatfield couldn't turn his head, but he knew that Red Bouchard and Fox Edley and Swede Larssen were trussed up in similar fashion. He wondered if Jean had betrayed them. It certainly looked that way.

Four long whips began to hiss and crack like gunshots, and fiery pain ate through the flesh into the bone. Stroke on stroke the lashes fell, slashing and searing, laying the skin open in raw stripes. Beaten breathless against that tree trunk, flooded with agony, Jim Hatfield locked his teeth against screaming and steeled himself to endure the torture.

CHAPTER IX

Gateway to Texas

KING GAFFNEY was smiling in satisfaction, and Chico Pereda's full wet lips were skinned back on his teeth. Teke Hyde went on striking with every ounce of strength in his wide, brawny frame. Anguish filled Hatfield to the limit, and went on and on. He longed for unconsciousness, but it did not come. The bullwhips made a sodden sound now, with blood flying at every stroke.

Someone screamed, and Hatfield choked back his own moaning with a great effort. Ablaze with mounting agony, Hatfield hung in his bonds and shuddered under the wicked leather, praying for it to end.

At last one whip ceased, as Fox Edley sagged senseless on his tree trunk. Then Red Bouchard succumbed, and another lash was silenced. Finally Swede Larssen passed out, and only Hatfield remained to suffer under the scourging. And Jim Hatfield had reached the point where he couldn't possibly endure any more pain, when unconsciousness came at last, like a blessing and a benediction.

"Leave 'em there," King Gaffney said. "Tomkins, you stay here on guard." His laugh boomed out. "I don't think they'll give you much trouble for a few hours."

"We'll bring the Indian up to finish them, won't we?" Chico Pereda said, panting with eagerness.

"If they ain't finished already," said Gaffney. "I don't think there's much life in any of 'em. Nothing much there for 'Pache to work on, but they'll come to sooner or later. Too bad Jean wasn't here to see this."

"My arm's tired enough to drop right off," muttered Teke Hyde. "That big Ranger's one tough hombre. But I sure enjoyed every minute of it. Waited a long while to get a crack at that Hatfield."

"Too bad there's no anthill to stake them out on," Pereda said.

Gaffney grinned down at him. "You never get enough of this stuff, do you, Chico? Damned if you couldn't sit and watch it night and day. Come on, let's get back down to camp."

They mounted and rode off, leaving the renegade, Tomkins, behind, bored and lonely, with the four unconscious prisoners drooping in their bonds.

After they had gone, Goldy came back, herding the other horses along before him, shying away at the sight of Tomkins but not going far. Tomkins contemplated shooting the big golden sorrel, but decided against it. That was too much horse to kill, for no reason at all except spite. He wondered if anyone else besides Hatfield could tame, gentle and ride that stallion. Probably not, without a long grueling battle in the breaking corral. But it

would be worth it, to master a horse like that.

Tomkins looked at the four captives and shuddered, wondering how he would stand up under a lashing like that. Not as well as they had, he thought, hoping he'd never be put to the test.

Circling, and cropping grass at some distance, the great sorrel and the other horses looked up now and then at Tomkins and the four half-naked figures hanging senseless on the trees, and snorted softly at the smell of blood. The other broncs wanted to run, but Goldy held them there. . . .

Jim Hatfield came back to life in a fiery furnace, a sheet of pain flaming from the back of his neck to his hips. He was embracing that tree trunk, with rawhide thongs cutting into his wrists and ankles. Rolling his agonized eyes skyward, he glimpsed the Big Dipper and figured it was about midnight.

Behind him the horses were moving restlessly, and a lone man stepped forward, rifle in hand. Hatfield felt scarred and ashamed for life from that whipping. Only the death of Gaffney and Pereda and Hyde, all those renegades, would ever wipe out any part of it.

And Jean Tremblay had brought them to this! The girl with whom he had become infatuated, and had fancied it was love! King Gaffney's woman—or creature.

Hatfield should have known she wasn't to be trusted. Jean never had rung quite true. On that first voyage aboard the *Gulf Queen*, she'd actually been working with Lopez and Rivera. That night in Matamoros, she practically delivered him into their hands for a beating.

OTHER visions returned to him. Jean, a "prisoner" in that adobe at Valhalla. Jean, the loveliest flower in that tropical garden in Monterey. And now she had insured the initial success, at least, of the Mexican invasion of Texas. Unless Hatfield and his comrades somehow broke away, and got back to Laredo in time to raise an army of their own.

It would have to be soon, too. Before Pereda brought the Apache up here to slice them to pieces with his skilled knife. Hatfield shuddered deep inside. That Indian could carve a man for hours, before the victim died.

He heard the clop of hoofs, and knew then that it was too late even to think of escape. But only one rider was coming. He wondered who it could be. The Indian perhaps, or Pereda himself.

The hoofs chopped closer in the darkness. A shot splintered the stillness of the night. Craning his neck, Hatfield saw the sentry, Tomkins, sit down abruptly and cough blood, roll over groaning and lie motionless across his rifle.

Then saddle leather creaked, quick footsteps ran toward him, and a woman's voice sounded in Hatfield's ear, "Oh no, *no!* Dear God in heaven!" The voice of Jean Tremblay, and a whiff of her familiar fragrance reached the Ranger.

She slashed his bonds, and Hatfield slid to earth. There was an interval of anguish, as the circulation started in his numb hands and feet, and his raw back was on fire.

Jean cut the others free and came back to kneel beside Hatfield. "Change your mind, Jean?" he asked, strong features bleak and haggered.

"I didn't doublecross you—intentionally," she said. "They followed me up here, Jim."

With light, tender hands, Jean was applying some cool soothing ointment to his torn back and shoulders. When she left him to administer to the others, Hatfield wondered if he could rise and walk, dreading the attempt to make the slightest motion that might start the searing agony again.

"Can you ride, Jim?" The girl was crouching over him again. "There isn't too much time. They're bringing the Apache up."

"We'll *have* to ride," Hatfield said, sweating at the thought of it. "Did you find out anything, Jean?"

The coppery head nodded. "They're attacking Thursday night—two nights from now. Crossing at Selbro's Ford above Laredo. About midnight."

"That's straight, Jean?"

"Of course it's straight!"

Hatfield smiled thinly. "You can't blame me much. For being doubtful."

"I know." Her tone was hollow and despairing.

"Which side you really on, Jean?" he asked. "Or can't you make up your mind?"

She shook her bowed red-gold head. "I wish I was dead, Jim." A sob caught in her throat. "I don't want to live any more."

"It ain't going to be fun," Fox Edley grimaced. "But we can do it."

"Sure, we can," mumbled Swede Larssen, straining to hold his yellow head up.

Jean Tremblay gathered and distributed their jackets and torn shirts, but they didn't try to put them on at present. Their weapons were gone, of course, and they felt naked and helpless in the night.

"Thursday night," Hatfield murmured. "We've got maybe forty-eight hours to shut the gateway to Texas."

A TALL TEXAS TALE

GREAT GRAPEFRUIT

THE WOMAN in the flouncy dress that stopped into Fertile Myrtle's fruit farm asked for a dozen grapefruit, then before Myrtle could fill the order, began to sound off about the verdant soil of Indiana that would grow anything bigger and better than it could be grown anywhere else.

When she stopped talking long enough for Myrtle to hand her the grapefruit she'd ordered, the woman looked into the bag and exclaimed, "Why, there are only three grapefruit in here! I distinctly remember telling you I wanted a dozen."

Myrtle put her hands on her hips and there was a wicked glint in her eye. "Take a good look at those grapefruit, sister. They're Texas raised. Which mean's they're so big it takes only three to make a dozen. You want to argufy the matter?"

The woman in the flouncy dress glanced at the corded muscles in the arms that fell from the sleeves of Fertile Myrtle's dress, and shook her head. Then she fled pronto, muttering something that sounded like, "Well, I never!"

"Don't talk that way, girl."

Jim Hatfield set his teeth, braced his arms, and drew his knees up in under him. Sweat glistened in great drops all over his face and body. Every movement was sheer misery. He got to his feet and stood swaying, panting, holding onto the tree. He lurched down the line, helping the other men upright, one after another. They came up reluctantly, groaning and sobbing for breath, trying to grin at him.

"Some whuppin', huh, Jim?" panted Red Bouchard.

"We've got to ride for it, boys," Hatfield told them.

HE WHISTLED to Goldy, and the sorrel moved in, herding the other horses ahead of him. The men gulped water from their canteens, and nothing ever tasted sweeter. Life was beginning to flow in them once more, but with it came scalding, sickening pain.

Bouchard bit off a chew and handed the plug to Edley. "If we can get into the saddle, I reckon we can stick there," Red said.

"You'd better hurry as fast as possible," Jean Tremblay warned. "They'll be coming up from camp—with that Indian."

It required a tremendous effort in each instance, but finally they were all mounted. Hatfield glanced at the carbine in the girl's saddle-boot.

"Let me borrow that rifle, Jean?"

"No, Jim," she said. "This is one time I think I can use it better than any of you."

They drifted north along the lofty surface of Blue Mesa, the men wracked by every jolt of the hoofs. Hatfield dropped back beside the girl.

"I can't figure this out, Jean," he said. "But I reckon it's all over. There's nothing left—for us."

"I'm no good, Jim," Jean said bitterly. "But whatever happens, no matter what you think of me, I want you to know I was happy with you. Happier than I've ever been, Jim. If things had been different, if I'd been good enough for you—But what's the use?"

"What's the story, Jean? You're in love with King Gaffney?"

"No, I thought I was—once. But not any more. I hate him! Almost as much as I detest that loathesome little Pereda!"

"There's nothing holding you to them, then," Hatfield said.

She laughed brokenly, with self-mockery. "But there is, Jim. That's the awful part of it. My life is ruined, a complete mess. And look what I've done to you tonight!"

"We'll be all right, we'll get over this." Hatfield assured her. "But I still don't understand, Jean."

Her smile was wry and crooked. "It's beyond understanding. Forget about it, Jim Hatfield—and about me."

"You know who I am then?"

"Yes, I know."

"You've known all along, Jean?"

She inclined her lovely auburn head. "Please, Jim, please—"

They reached the northern rimrock of Blue Mesa, and the break that led downward. Behind them in the distance rose the abrasive sound of hoofbeats. Gaffney and Pereda and the rest, coming with their Indian to finish off the Americans in slow, unspeakable torture. Halted and listening at the head of the pass, Hatfield would have given anything to have their guns back. To be able to ride against that mad-dog pack of traitors and renegade Mexicans.

"I'm leaving you here," Jean Tremblay said, with quiet firmness, the carbine across her pommel now.

"You're coming with us," Hatfield said hoarsely. "You've got to come, Jean."

"No, Jim. I'm staying here."

"But they'll kill you, girl. They'll turn you over to the Apache." Hatfield swung his sorrel toward her, but Jean lifted and lined the rifle on him.

"Don't come any closer, Jim. I'll shoot if you do! Get along down that trail—while you can."

Hatfield and his comrades stared at her in stunned amazement. The carbine was cocked, and the look in her eyes said she would fire, if necessary. In the south, the hoofs were drumming louder and nearer.

"Ride, damn you!" cried Jean Tremblay. "You want to die by inches under that knife?"

"But why, Jean?" demanded Hatfield, in desperation. "What are you staying for?"

She laughed hysterically. "Because King Gaffney is my husband! Is that reason enough? Get out of here now. Get over that rim and ride for the river, you fools!"

The beat of hoofs became thunderous as the enemy discovered their absence back there and came on at a gallop.

"All right, boys," Jim Hatfield said dully. "Let's be riding." He gestured and the other three riders dropped into the downward passage. "Good-by, Jean," he called gently.

"Good-by, Jim," the girl said, choked and sobbing. "Good-by, my love. And God bless you always."

5 *Action Novels Every Issue In*
FIVE WESTERN NOVELS
Now On Sale—25c At All Stands!

CHAPTER X

Blood On The Rio Grande

WITH a taut aching knot in his throat, Hatfield put the sorrel over the edge and down that steep winding cut after his companions.

They were at the bottom when gunfire crashed out on the rim-rock high above. Jean was holding the pass, giving them the extra time they needed to assure escape. If she had led them into that trap, she had also relented in time to set them free. And now she was fighting to guarantee their get-away, a lone girl against a wolf-pack of renegades. Sacrificing her life up there to save theirs.

Hatfield hoped a bullet would find her and end it, mercifully quick and clean, before she could fall into those evil hands. It was too horrible to think of the brute-faced Apache working over her dainty, beautiful body.

The shooting continued as they rode for the Rio Grande, tattered shirts or jackets draped over their burning shoulders and backs. The girl was making a good fight on the tableland of Blue Mesa. Good-by, Jean, good-by forever.

They entered Laredo in the early morning hours. There was a light in the office of the Border Patrol, and they stopped there to find Milt Travers and Ramsey sitting up with several members of the other organization. Hatfield told them briefly what had happened, and about the invasion scheduled for Thursday night.

A glance at the raw lash-striped backs of the four riders was enough to convince the most skeptical Border Patrol man now of the seriousness of the situation. At daybreak they would start recruiting an armed force to defend the homeland of Texas.

"They might strike tomorrow night, if they figure the girl told us about their plan to attack Thursday night," Jim Hatfield said. "We'll have to be ready for it any time from here on."

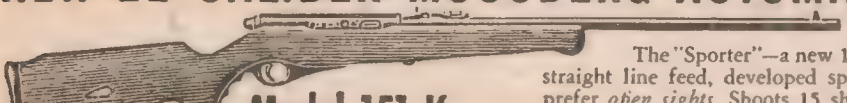
He was disgusted because no Ranger company from Austin had showed up yet. What was the matter with Bill McDowell anyway? Maybe he'd been riding that desk chair too long.

Leaving their horses for Ramsey and Travers to take care of, Hatfield and his three battered companions dragged themselves wearily to old Doc Seward's house and roused the veteran medical man to cleanse, sterilize, treat and dress their gashed backs. Grumbling throughout the long process, Doc Seward attended them with learned skill and thorough scrupulous care, and put them to bed in the wing that served as his private hospital, with sedatives to ease the pain and permit them to sleep.

It was mid-afternoon when they awoke. The doctor bathed and dressed their backs again, and Ramsey and Travers brought them fresh clothing and guns.

[*Turn page*]

NEW 22 CALIBER MOSSBERG AUTOMATIC WITH OPEN SIGHTS



Model 151 K

Only $31.95 ($32.95 West of Rockies)

The "Sporter"—a new 15-shot, automatic with straight line feed, developed specially for those who prefer *open sights*. Shoots 15 shots as fast as you can pull the trigger. Receiver is grooved for Mossberg 4-power scope, Model #4M4. Handles all 22 cal. Long Rifle cartridges.

JOIN A GUN CLUB
Organized shooting is loads of fun—and you'll find the nicest folks in town are members.

See it at your dealer's
Send for FREE catalog
No sales at factory

Open rear sight

Blade front sight

O. F. MOSSBERG & SONS, INC., 22611 St. John St., New Haven 5, Conn.

The sun-flooded streets of Laredo were swarming with armed men and horses. Ranchers and cowboys in range garb, farmers and homesteaders in bib overalls, hunters and scouts in buckskin, lumberjacks in plaid shirts and stagged pants. Bearded miners and prospectors. Business men in store suits. Gamblers with fancy vests and frock coats. Ragged drifters and loafers, bemustached bartenders, frail clerks, and brawny wagoners. Texans all, the fiery spirit of the Alamo still burning in their veins.

That evening Jim Hatfield and his friends were resting and smoking cigars on the porch of the Border Hotel when a stir of excitement and horror rippled along the street. Hoofs hammered and a lathered wild-eyed black horse swept in on the run. Lashed across his back was the blanket-wrapped body of a woman, coppery red hair streaming from the limp hanging head.

A man caught the frenzied horse in front of the hotel, and others untied the body and laid it gently down on the slat sidewalk. A crowd gathered instantly, and red rage erupted all along the street.

HATFIELD, sickened and saddened to the depths, raised his gaunt, stricken face, as a boy climbed the steps and handed him a placard.

"This was on her, Mr. Hatfield. Dirty rotten scum!"

The Ranger looked down at the crudely printed legend:

HERE'S YOUR WOMAN, HATFIELD. WHAT SHE GOT FOR SAVING YOUR LIFE. WHAT YOU GET WILL BE A LOT WORSE.

Numb and frozen, Hatfield passed the pasteboard on, and a low snarling sound accompanied it along the veranda. Red Bouchard returned from viewing the body.

"She got it good and clean and quick, Jim. One shot, right through the heart."

Turning blindly away, Jim Hatfield went upstairs to his room and fell face down across the bed. He had to be alone with his grief and sorrow, his rage and hatred, and the agony that still smoldered in his back. He felt encrusted with horror, dry silent screams rending him inside, and fury blazing up like a vast bonfire, too great to be contained.

The Rio Grande was guarded that Wednesday night, Jim Hatfield and Ramsey and Milt Travers commanding at Selbro's Ford on the north, the Border Patrol in charge of a smaller defending force at Chatham Crossing in the south. But no offensive was launched from below the Border.

Thursday crept by and there were still no reinforcements from Ranger headquarters in Austin. Thursday night passed without an attack, and the malcontents and troublemakers began to complain that it was just another false alarm. But most of the Texans, still aroused and steaming over that ghastly envoy of death from the enemy camp, were willing to wait indefinitely for a crack at the renegade Mexicans. And if they didn't come up here, the Americans were ready to go down there after them.

In the blackness before dawn, on Friday morning, the Mexican outlaw army struck with full and overwhelming force at Selbro's Ford in the Rio Grande, upstream above Laredo.

At Selbro's Ford, high wooded bluffs flanked the shallows and the broad-dug road on either side of the river. Hatfield had about three hundred men there, and Lieutenant Martell of the Border Patrol had another hundred-and-fifty downriver at Chatham Crossing. The faces of both bluffs on the American shore were lined with riflemen, tier on tier from the water's edge to the crest, with Milt Travers in command of the left flank and Ramsey in charge of the right wing. In the center, Jim Hatfield waited with his cavalry, Red Bouchard and Fox Edley and Swede Larssen serving as his subordinates.

The Mexicans had cannon set up on their bluffs, and riflemen along the heights to support the attack. They opened up with the cannon, the balls crashing through the trees and brush on the Texas side, dismembering men here and there and striking terror into the ranks.

Hatfield was dismayed by this artillery barrage, knowing how untrained militia dreaded cannon fire, but Travers and Ramsey seemed to be holding their detachments in control. Under cover of artillery and rifle fire from above, the mounted assault splashed into the shallows and surged forward in sheets of spray, a seemingly endless horde of howling riders. American sharpshooters mowed down horses and men, but they kept coming, wave on wave.

Hatfield estimated that Gaffney and Pereda must have at least eight hundred men in this offensive, and he dispatched a courier to call up reinforcements from Martell at Chatham Crossing.

The Texas rifles wrought terrible execution, and the current was choked with dead and dying mounts and riders, yet the onslaught carried on in fanatical fury. Fired up with *tequila*, drunk on blood lust as well as liquor, the enemy came driving onward, wallowing and trampling over their own dead.

There was hand-to-hand fighting along the shoreline now, and Jim Hatfield mounted Goldy and led his cavalry forward in a headlong charge, Bouchard and Larssen and Edley riding close behind him. Guns aflame, they smashed into the Mexicans at the riverside and drove them back into the water, firing until their guns were empty, then slashing out with the barrels or unlimbering their carbines.

AFTER a brief savage welter in fire and smoke, horse against horse and stirrup to stirrup, the enemy was hurled back into milling confusion in midstream. Riders from the rear, piling into the front ranks, added to the chaos.

Hatfield withdrew and reformed his mounted men in the center, holding them in reserve, while the riflemen on the flanks poured their crossfire into the Mexican cavalry in midstream. The sky was graying with pre-dawn light now, white mists hovering along the Rio Grande, and the water ran darkly red with blood, as bullets churned the current into a boiling cauldron.

There was a lull in the battle as the Mexican horsemen pulled back out of the shallows on their side, but the enemy cannon went on belching fire, blasting down trees and men on the American shore.

If we could get to those two cannon! thought Hatfield. They'll smash us to pieces, if we don't. A couple of men might get through to each gun, but I can't send anybody on such a suicidal mission.

He discussed the project with his comrades. Red Bouchard and Fox Edley volunteered to take one of the cannon. Hatfield shook his head.

"Not yet, boys. If Martell comes up, we'll see about it."

Reorganized, the Mexicans launched another attack into the river, the riders splashing, screaming and shooting, as they came hurtling across through the firelit fog. Crouched amidst cannon-wrecked cottonwoods and blackjacks, the Texas flankers lashed them with a withering crossfire, and Hatfield took his cavalry forward again to meet this new thrust.

But the enemy would certainly have carried the ford this time, if Lieutenant Martell hadn't come up with a hundred fresh men to throw into the action, barely soon enough to save the American position and turn back the renegades. Once more the Rio Grande ran crimson with the blood of horses and men. But those cannon were still splintering oaks and salt cedars, and cutting swaths in the ranks of Texas men. They must be silenced, if the line was to hold.

Jim Hatfield knew then what he had to do, and now that Martell was here he could try it. Leaving Martell in command of the cavalry in the center, Jim dispatched Bouchard and Edley around the bluff on the south, and took Swede Larssen with him to circle behind the heights in the north. The air was still dark and murky, hazed with gray vapors.

Leaving their horses on the bank, Hatfield and Larssen waded across the Rio Grande on a series of sand bars, and crept down the opposite shoreline in the mist-shrouded willows and brush. Swerving inland, they climbed toward the summit of the bluff, on which one of the cannon was roaring at regular intervals. Down-

stream, if all went well, Bouchard and Edley would be engaged in a similar maneuver against the other piece of artillery.

Hatfield had an ulterior motive for making this daring hazardous move. Chances were that the commanders, Chico Pereda and King Gaffney, had taken a vantage point on one or the other of these heights of land, in order to overlook the entire field of action. Hatfield hoped they were on this upper palisade. He wanted to kill Pereda and Gaffney for very personal reasons, as well as for the good of the cause. With the two generals dead, the Mexican attack would lose momentum and fall apart.

Slowly, carefully, Hatfield and Larssen crawled up the damp fog-wreathed slope, their torn backs stiff and sore.

When Jim Hatfield peered over the top, the cannon and its three-man crew were close by, the piece exploding with a concussion that beat upon his eardrums. Laughing, the three Mexicans began to reload.

There was no one else in sight, at first. Then, fifty yards along the forward crest, Hatfield saw some men with rifles, aiming and shooting as if on a target range. One of them was stocky Teke Hyde. Beyond him were the skeletonlike Jeeter Jethro and fat, round-faced Tyle Capott.

Hatfield and Larssen lined their Winchesters on the gunners and squeezed off simultaneous shots. Two of the Mex renegades spun and fell. The third turned, clawing at his holster, and Jim Hatfield drilled him through the head. The silent cannon went unnoticed for a short space, until somebody shouted from the rear of the bluff.

TEKE HYDE wheeled then and ran toward the field piece, with Jethro and Capott on his heels. The Ranger and the Swede waited until they were nearing the big gun. Hatfield shot Hyde through the stomach, and he flopped screaming and squirming in the grass. Larssen all but blew Jethro's skull-like head off his shoulders.

Capott was shooting at the attackers frantically, kicking sod and dirt in their faces, but both held firm and hammered bullets into his corpulent body, knocking him backward against the base of a palmetto.

No one else was coming. The other riflemen had disappeared.

Hatfield and Larssen rose and ran forward to load and man the gun. Swede rammed in the powder and ball, and they turned and depressed the barrel to bear midway on the ford below. The enemy had started another assault, with more horsemen than ever sloughing into the muddy shallows. The river banks and jutting rocks below the crossing were littered with the carcasses of horses and men.

CHAPTER XI

For Texas!

THE leading line of attackers was caught in a crosswhip of lead from the American wings, where Ramsey and Milt Travers were directing the fire. The charge went on, and Martell was coming down to engage it with his Texas riders.

Hatfield touched off the cannon, and the earth shuddered under the blast. The ball ripped a gap in the Mexican ranks, a great geyser of bloody water rising high in midstream. But the attack rolled onward, and this time Martell and the Texas shore were going to be overrun.

The other cannon roared from the bluff down the river, tearing another hole in the massed enemy column, and Hatfield knew that Red Bouchard and Fox Edley had gained their objective and wiped out that gun crew. But the American cavalry was being driven back from the riverside under sheer weight of numbers.

The Mexicans were securing a foothold on the soil of Texas! Hatfield and Larssen emptied their carbines into the evil horde, but it swarmed on across the Rio Grande. Everything seemed to be lost now, as the sun rose blood-red in the east.

Then a tremendous shout rose on the American side, and Hatfield's heart soared as he saw fresh columns of horsemen galloping in to support Martell in the center. It looked like Captain Bill McDowell himself, with a full company or more of Texas Rangers. It *was* Roaring Bill with the long-awaited reinforcements from Austin!

The enemy faltered, broke, and fell back from this new impact. The Rangers rode them back and down in the water, drove them cross-stream with terrific slaughter. The Mexicans were in full flight now, the tide of battle turned with lightning speed.

"What a sight!" Swede Larssen murmured. "Prettiest thing I ever saw, Jim."

"It sure is, Swede," agreed Hatfield. "Cap'n Bill in the nick of time."

Something twitched at Hatfield's brush jacket and snatched at his hat, and bullets clanged off the iron cannon with the sound of bells. He swiveled around with smooth, lithe swiftness, the big Colts leaping up in his hands. Larssen threw his guns clear and level.

From the rear of the bluff, big Cactus Bruton and hunched Pecos Sanchez and the monkeylike Mercedes had opened fire on them, flames jetting, slugs screeching all about them.

As his barrels came into line, Jim Hatfield thumbed the hammers and took the hard bucking recoils, the twin muzzle-

[*Turn page*]

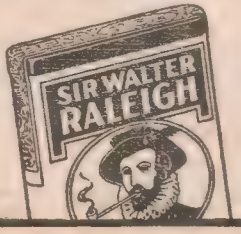
UNCLE WALTER

IT SMOKES SWEET

—HAPPINESS FOR ALL CONCERNED!
—with Sir Walter Raleigh!

IT CAN'T BITE!

SIR WALTER RALEIGH'S BLEND OF CHOICE KENTUCKY BURLEYS IS EXTRA-AGED TO GUARD AGAINST TONGUE BITE, AND SIR WALTER RALEIGH NEVER LEAVES A SOGGY HEEL IN YOUR PIPE. STAYS LIT TO THE LAST PUFF.



It costs no more to get the best!

lights splitting the gloom with a concerted roar. Cactus Bruton doubled and dropped on his knees, head in the dirt, hands pawing at his abdomen. Monk Mercedes fell against a cottonwood and slipped to the ground, spidery arms wrapped around the bole. Swede Larssen's shots slammed Pecos Sanchez flat on his warped shoulders, to kick spasmodically before subsiding into stillness.

"Look out, Jim!" yelled Larssen.

Out of the underbrush, silent as a shadow, the brute-faced Apache came with a hatchet slashing at Hatfield's head, and Larssen couldn't fire without hitting Jim. The Ranger dodged and struck with a gun-barrel, the tomahawk clipping cloth and skin from his shoulder, as the long steel barrel crushed the Indian's cheekbone and nose. The Apache went down with a strangled moan, blood gushing from his ruined face. Swede Larssen pumped a couple of quick shots into him to make sure.

Jim Hatfield's gray-green eyes swept the bluff top, but there were no more enemies in view. He glanced over the rim at the river. Rangers and Texans were coming across in fountains of silvery spray, hard after the fleeing renegade Mexican forces. The battle was just about over, the Rio Grande damned high with enemy dead, the threat of invasion broken and ended.

But where were King Gaffney and Chico Pereda? Hatfield couldn't let them escape, to raise another rabble and plot another campaign!

Then, as if in answer to an unspoken prayer, he glimpsed the giant ex-soldier and the scrawny little Mexican moving through the blackjack oaks at the back of the summit.

"Come on, Swede!" he called, leaping into stride. "The two big ones! The ones we want!"

They raced past the corpses of Bruton, Sanchez and Mercedes, bent on intercepting the two outlaw "generals" before they could reach their horses.

KING GAFFNEY and Chico Pereda whirled, guns in hand, as they heard the other two men come crashing through the undergrowth. The King towering, red-faced and cold-eyed. Pereda a dark wisp of a man with negroid features and insane hooded black eyes. The range was still long for hand guns, but Gaffney and Pereda both started shooting. Slowed to a walk, Hatfield and Larssen stalked on toward them, holding their fire.

"You've won, you fools!" Gaffney shouted. "What do you want with us?"

"They want to die," spat Pereda, with a maniac's snarl. "Come on and die, gringo dogs!"

"Drop your guns," Hatfield said.

Gaffney laughed barkingly, Pereda cackled weirdly, and their revolvers spouted loud fire again. Feeling the passage of lead and within fair range now, Jim Hatfield and Swede Larssen lifted their guns into line and let go with both hands, the flames torching in a thunderous blend of blinding light and sound.

King Gaffney twirled from the double shock of the .45 slugs, took three long plunging strides, and pitched face-forward into a bed of brambles. In hatred and for what Gaffney had done to Jean Tremblay, Hatfield emptied his right-hand gun into that huge shivering bulk, the dust smoking up as the shots smashed into Gaffney.

Chico Pereda, with Larssen's bullets in him, bounced off a blackjack tree, spun about on queerly jittering legs, and lunged headlong to earth, his madman's face buried in the dusty leafmold and rank weeds. Remembering the lash, Larssen filled him with lead.

"Now it's really over, Swede," said Jim Hatfield, as they reloaded their cylinders. "Now Texas can rest in peace."

"And you, Jim?" said Larssen, with a homely smile. "You sure had some vacation."

"Yeah, it was quite a holiday, all right," Hatfield said drily. "Maybe I can go back to work now and get rested up."

"You think I can get into the Rangers, Jim?" asked Larssen. "I figure Art Loomis would kinda like it, if I did that."

"I know you can, Swede," said Hatfield. "After what you've done here, it'll be a

cinch. Let's go down and find Bill McDowell and the other boys."

"I hope Bouchard and Edley made it all right, Jim."

Hatfield smiled. "There aren't enough outlaws in Mexico to kill those two, I reckon."

"They're a great pair," Swede Larssen said. "I'm sure glad I got off the *Gulf Queen* in Matamoros. It'd be just about perfect, if Art Loomis was here with us."

Hatfield nodded somberly. He missed that boy, too. There were a lot of folks for Jim Hatfield to miss. Sometimes, in moments of rare melancholy, he wondered when his own luck would run out.

They went back the way they had come, descending from the heights and walking upstream, to cross the river and pick up their horses and jog back toward the ford. Fox Edley and Red Bouchard met them at the road, and they exchanged experiences and quiet congratulations.

They were all enthusiastic over the timely arrival of the Rangers. Milt Travers and Ramsey joined them at the riverside, their clear young faces powder-grimed and sweaty, eyes sunken and haunted.

"It sure was some relief when you boys took over those cannons," Milt Travers said. "I was getting sick of those damn cannonballs."

"It was pretty bad," Ramsey admitted. "The men stood up to it mighty well, though."

"Takes a lot of heart," Jim Hatfield said, "for untrained men to stand up against cannon fire."

THE cavalry returned across the Rio Grande, led by Captain Bill McDowell and Lieutenant Martell of the Border Patrol.

Martell remarked, "That Mex army is scattered all over northeast Mexico. But we didn't see Pereda and Gaffney anywhere. They must've started running early."

"Not early enough, Mart," said Jim Hatfield, with a grave smile. "They're both dead, up on that north bluff."

"That's good news for Texas, Jim," said Bill McDowell. "But you boys took an awful long chance, going after those big guns."

"It wasn't so bad, Cap'n," said Hatfield. "And we've got some new recruits for you here."

"We can use them all right," McDowell said grimly. "Jim, I want you to know I'm sorry I didn't get here sooner. But I couldn't get a directive from higher up. The brass hats wouldn't believe there was any danger of an invasion. You know how it is."

"I know, Bill," said Hatfield, rubbing his powder-blackened mouth to conceal a grin. It was so unusual to see McDowell apologetic about anything, that it amused Jim. "You got here in time anyway, Cap'n. Just in time, as a matter of fact."

McDowell shook his graying head. "Might have saved a lot of lives, if we'd arrived earlier." His eyes took on a faint glint of friendly malice. "Well, Jim, now that you've had a nice quiet restful vacation, I suppose you're all ready to get back on the job? You don't want to get lazy and rusty, hanging around loafing and doing nothing."

"That's right, Cap'n Bill," said Jim Hatfield, with a slow, easy smile. "I'm sure ready to go back to work."

"Drilling recruits, maybe?" murmured Bill McDowell.

"Even that, I reckon," sighed Jim Hatfield. "Especially that, Bill, if you'll give me these new recruits of mine to drill." He grinned at Swede Larssen and Red Bouchard and Fox Edley.

Red Bouchard spat, shrugged, and scratched at his whiskers. "That does it, for fair. That loses the Rangers a real top-hand. I was thinking of joining up, but I sure ain't going to be drilled and hounded and sweated by that big larruping galoot of a Hatfield."

Next Month: JIM HATFIELD in LAND OF THE LOST

"Looka here, Dory—maybe it's murder!"

If you would hide the evidence of a killing . . .

Dig The Hole Deep

By GILES A. LUTZ

DORY ANDREWS sat on his heels, crumbling clods of dirt in his hand. His eyes were morosely fastened on the sheriff's office across the street. Twenty minutes Letty Campbell had been in there—how much longer would she be? What could Letty and Clayton Fisher find to talk about on such a hot day that would take this long?

He picked up another clod and savagely flung it at the wall beside him. It made a dull thud as it splattered to pieces. The shade was only a narrow band, extending out from the wall. Just the small ex-

ertion of throwing the clod seemed to start the sweat anew on Dory's forehead.

He tipped his hat back and mopped his forehead with the back of his hand. His swearing at the heat and other things was a soundless rumble in his throat. The street was a sun-baked stretch, the ground dry and cracked. Somewhere at the edge of town a dog yapped listlessly. A rider cantered down the street. The dust from the hoofs rose, hung, and fell sullenly with no breath of air to pull it along.

Old man Ellison came out on the veranda of his store. Dory heard his limping stride as he moved along it. He flattened against the wall, hoping Ellison would not come to the end of the porch and see him. The old man was shrewd. He would not have any trouble guessing why Dory sat out here in this heat, watching the door of the sheriff's office.

Dory sighed and straightened. The footsteps were coming all the way. Maybe he could make it look as though he were just cutting through this gap between the buildings.

HE STEPPED around the corner of the porch, a tall, lank man with the intense sobriety of youth on his face. He was hard muscled from endless hours of saddle work, and he moved as though the ground were a strange element. His eyes were a light gray with a spark of humor deep within them.

He said with forced casualness, "Howdy, Mac Hot ain't it?"

The old man cackled. "She ain't come out yet, has she?" Ellison's laughter increased at the expression on Dory's face, and he delightedly slapped his leg. He was semi-bald, and the top of his head was pink. His eyes sat in aged crinkles, but they still held a sharpness, sometimes a malicious sharpness.

"Thought I didn't see you sitting out there swearing and looking." Ellison doubled over, gasping with his laughter.

Dory's face was red. He managed to say evenly, "Shut up, Mac."

Ellison caught his breath, though his shoulders continued to shake. "I wouldn't be young again for a million dollars. Young 'uns are mad or unhappy all the time."

He peered at Dory, those old eyes sharply bright. "She still mad at you, huh? Come on up and sit down. You'll have a stroke fuming out there in that sun."

Dory reluctantly climbed the three steps. He hooked a box with the toe of his boot and pulled it to him. He shifted his gun and sat down, feeling his outward defenses crumbling, leaving his face naked and defenseless.

He said, "Mac, what do you do with a hard-headed girl?"

Ellison grinned. "Is there another kind?" He shook his head. "Clayton Fisher kinda beating you out, huh?"

Dory's eyes blazed. He held the hot words on his tongue. Old man Ellison might only be saying the truth.

Dory said gloomily, "I took a job under Clayton Fisher to be near her. I guess I didn't know how much Fisher hung around her until I moved into town."

That was putting it mildly. It didn't seem as though he could get ten minutes with Letty without Fisher hurrying up. This morning's argument had been because Dory had complained about it. Letty had turned on him, crying that he was jealous because of Fisher's smoothness and polish.

Dory popped a knuckle on his hand. She should be the man's deputy for three months. That would change a lot of her ideas. Just as it had changed his. Fisher had a smooth, bland face towards his public. But to somebody under him, he was a tough boss.

Dory sighed inwardly. At least, he had Doc Campbell, Letty's father, on his side. The doc didn't seem to care for Fisher, either. Dory thought morosely, but he doesn't do anything about it. Fisher goes in and out of Doc's house like he owns it.

Ellison said, "Don't like him, do you, boy? You ain't the first. Yet he's popular —with a few people at least." The malicious glee was in his eyes again. "I guess you're one of the ones who've crossed him."

Dory said flatly, "Got to be moving along." Already, he had exposed too much

of his hand. The old gossip would nurse it along carefully, elaborating it until it was all out of proportion to the original words.

Ellison put out a hand to detain him. "Clayton seems to be doing awful well on the 18 hundred a year the county pays him. Did you ever notice his clothes, the way he spends money?"

Dory stared steadily at him. He would make no comment on that remark that the old man could use later. He said, "I only draw a deputy's salary to do what he tells me." He nodded and moved down the steps.

Ellison's words kept running through his mind. He had noticed those things. He irritably shrugged the thoughts away. That was Fisher's personal business.

HE MOVED down the street, making a pretense of not being interested in the sheriff's office. He could still feel the old man's eyes upon him all the way down the block.

A boy of 12 turned the corner and almost bumped into him. His face was flushed from the heat and his running. He tried to say something, and his panting made his words unintelligible.

Dory reached out and grabbed his arms. "Take it easy, Tim," he drawled.

Tim Dahl stared at Dory with worshipping eyes. He was always following Dory about town like an adoring dog. He panted, "Looka here, Dory." His eyes were wide with excitement and a little fear. "Maybe it's a murder."

He held out a bucket, and Dory looked into it. His breathing sharpened. There was a skull in the bucket, and a length that looked like the large leg bone.

Tim said excitedly, "There's lots more, Dory. I didn't bring them all in."

Dory pulled him around the corner, out of sight of Ellison's eyes. The old man pried into too many things as it was.

He lifted the skull out of the bucket. There were bits of sandy soil in the eye sockets. "Where did you find this, Tim?"

"You know that big red rock in Horse Canyon? Right at the foot of it. I guess a rain washed it out. Do you think it's somebody we know?"

The skull hadn't weathered much. The white bone color was plainly apparent. Still it could be Indian, even if it did not look old enough. Rains and erosion were always washing up Indian bones. A tremor of excitement flickered inside Dory. But these bones should look a lot older if they were Indian. His mind went back over the three months he had been Fisher's deputy. He could think of no one who was missing.

He said, "Tim, you keep still about this. In the morning, we'll ride out to Horse Canyon and look around."

Tim's eyes glowed. "I'll kinda be your deputy, huh, Dory?"

Dory rumpled his hair. "You'll be my deputy," he said solemnly.

He put the skull into the bucket and turned towards the sheriff's office. He stepped inside, narrowing his eyes against the change in light. It was shadowy in the office, giving the illusion of coolness after the blast of the sun.

He thought Letty started guiltily, and his eyes were opaque. He nodded woodenly at her. He ached inside. She was small but sweetly rounded. Her hair looked like new copper, and her eyes were a light shade of green. He wondered how a girl could pack so much obstinacy in twenty years' time.

CLAYTON FISHER looked up from his desk with an amused grin. He was a dozen years older than Dory, somewhere in his middle thirties. His clothes were immaculate and expensive, his hands and face well groomed. Maybe he was a good sheriff—Dory had his own opinions on that matter.

He said, "Letty, could I talk to Clayton alone?"

Fisher purred, "This office has no secrets, Dory. We want the townspeople to know what we're doing."

Dory's eyes burned. That was some more of the charm Letty admired so much. He sat the bucket on the desk with a thump. His voice was harsh. "Tim Dahl brought these in." He heard Letty's startled gasp.

He could not be sure that was a flicker of interest in Fisher's eyes. The man's real feelings were always hard to read. Fisher picked up the skull with casual detachment. "Where did he find them?"

"Horse Canyon."

Fisher dropped the skull back into the bucket. It made a tinny clang. "Indian. You know how many are found around here."

Dory started to point out the fresh appearance of the skull. He clamped his lips shut and held it.

Fisher looked at Letty. "Young deputies are always getting steamed up over something." He got up, took her arm, and walked with her to the door. "You decided about the dance Saturday night?"

Dory could feel her eyes upon him. He traced a crack in the floor to the far wall, stubbornly refusing to look up.

"Yes," she said defiantly. "Yes, I have." She hurried out of the door. Dory heard her heels clicking across the wooden walk.

Fisher came back and said harshly, "Of all the fool stunts. Bringing that in here for her to see. Don't you ever think?"

Dory stared at him, his eyes bitter. Fisher's face grew savage under the look. He yelled, "Get those damned bones out of here. You pay more attention to your business instead of playing around with fool ideas."

Dory picked up the bucket and walked outside. He rolled a cigarette, and his hands were not quite steady. He couldn't take much more of that kind of talk from Fisher.

He stood undecided for a moment, then walked briskly towards the east side of town. Fisher was probably right about these being Indian bones. But just the same Dory intended to make sure.

He almost caught up with Letty before she entered her house. Doc Campbell was one of the wealthiest men in town. He didn't practice anymore, and his face held a secret gloom. Dory thought his wife's death, ten years ago, had caused that. Some men never rid themselves of that kind of sorrow.

He knocked on the door, and it opened immediately. He had the feeling Letty had seen him coming and was waiting for him. She looked at the bucket and shuddered. She said coldly, "Yes?"

"Could I see Doc?"

He thought she was going to refuse, then she stepped unwillingly aside. "He's in his study."

Dory said hoarsely, "Letty."

Her face was unyielding.

He said miserably, "I thought we were going to that dance." Her face flamed, he couldn't tell from what emotion. "Letty, what's wrong between us?"

"I'll tell you," she said, her voice rising. "You don't own me. You can't say who I can see or who I can talk to. I can't talk to anyone without you getting mad about it."

He protested, "That's not so. That's—" He stopped. Maybe she was right, maybe it looked that way to her. But it hurt to see her smiling up at another man. His lips tightened. He wouldn't beg her. He moved by her and knocked on the door of the study.

DOC CAMPBELL said, "Come in," and Dory opened the door. The doc looked up from his book. He was close to 60, and his hair was white. Fine lines ran out from the corner of his eyes, and his face was heavy. Dory thought, he's suffering from something.

He sat the bucket on the floor. He pulled out the skull and said, "Doc, Tim found this in Horse Canyon. They look too new to be Indian bones. How old are they?"

Campbell took a long time with his answer. Dory tried to read his face and couldn't. He thought perhaps the doc was checking through all his knowledge.

Campbell didn't touch the skull. He said quietly, "It's Indian, I'd say, Dory. It's pretty old. Maybe 50 years."

Dory was startled. That skull didn't look anywhere that old to him. Still, who was he to argue with a doctor.

He said, "Thanks, Doc. I was just checking to be sure."

Campbell was already looking at his book. He seemed a little impatient to be rid of Dory. Dory sighed. Always before, the doc had wanted to talk. Maybe Camp-

bell was accepting Fisher. Maybe Letty had influenced him.

Dory walked outside and looked back at the house. It was the finest in town. He thought of the cabin he had built on the section he was homesteading. He had been crazy to think Letty would ever consider something like that cabin after knowing this.

He thought about the bones a lot that night. He lay in the darkened room, his mind wandering restlessly. It was too hot to sleep anway. Fifty years old, at least. He couldn't argue against an opinion like the doc's. But still— He growled and threw the sheet from him. He wished he hadn't told Tim they would ride to Horse Canyon the next day.

Tim was eager-eyed in the morning when he met Dory at the edge of town. He was mounted on an ancient mare. Dory groaned inwardly. It would be a long, slow trip.

Tim looked at the shovel tied behind Dory's cantle. "The ground's sandy," he said. "You won't need that."

Dory let him lead the way. Importance stuck out all over the kid. This was a big day in his life.

He saw the big red rock when they were still a half mile from it. Tim pumped his heels into the old mare's sides, trying to get more speed out of her.

He yelled, "It's right here," and jumped off.

Dory looked at him. The kid was staring bewilderedly at the ground. "I dug a lot of bones," Tom said.

They weren't there now. Dory could see evidence of digging, digging such as a shovel might make. He said sharply, "You have a shovel yesterday?"

Tim shook his head.

"Ah," Dory said slowly.

He made a wide cast, looking for tracks. The ground was sandy, and there had been a wind during the night. The area was swept clean.

HE WAS deep in thought all the way back to town. He heard Tim say over and over, "Dory, they were there, I saw them."

Dory said softly, "I believe you, kid."

He left Tim at the edge of town and said, "Forget about this for awhile, kid." He looked back. Tim's face was woebegone. He thought he had let Dory down.

Dory went to his room, got the bucket, and moved down the street. He turned into a doorway that had a shingle hung over it. The shingle read, "Doctor Forest Cowles."

Cowles was young, somewhere over 30. He looked up and said, "Don't tell me you're sick, Dory."

Dory shook his head. "Doc, can you tell from the looks of this skull how long the man's been dead?"

Cowles threw him a bright-eyed glance before he looked at the skull. He held it high, turning it to the light. The interest glittered in his eyes when he looked at Dory. "What have you got, Dory? I'd say this hasn't been buried more than a year."

Dory drew a sharp breath. "You couldn't be mistaken. It couldn't be 50 years old."

Cowles snorted. "If it had been buried that long, it would be gray and crumbling away."

Dory picked up the bucket. He said softly, "Doc, I'd appreciate you not saying anything about this for awhile."

He went out onto the street, carrying the bucket. Fisher came towards him, and his eyes grew hot at sight of what Dory carried. He said violently, "I told you to forget that. You're taking county time—" He pulled in a long breath. "You're fired."

Dory stood there blinking after Fisher. It had come with unexpected suddenness. He thought the skull wasn't the real reason. The real reason was Letty. Fisher had been looking for an excuse ever since he had seen Dory look at her.

He thought ruefully, he could go ahead on his own time, and it wouldn't cost anyone a cent. He mentally checked over the people who had been around here a year ago, giving a few months margin either way. He couldn't pick a one who was missing. He sighed. He had been proving up his homestead at that time, and he

couldn't be certain about any individual. His face brightened. Old man Ellison might know.

HE LEANED across the counter and said, "Mac, anyone leave town unexpectedly about a year ago?"

Ellison's eyes grew sharp. "Why?"

Dory shook his head. "Just wondering, Mac."

Ellison snorted. "You might as well tell me. I'll find out about it in time."

He would, too. He had that kind of a nose. Dory patiently repeated his question.

Ellison cocked his head, thinking. "George Stevens suddenly left. No one knows where he went. He owned a little piece of ground just outside town. Quarrelsome cuss. Couldn't get along with anyone. He was the kind who would just pick up and leave his wife."

Dory asked with elaborate casualness, "His wife still in town?"

"She left a couple weeks later." Ellison's old eyes sharpened. "Now you want to know where she is."

Dory's breathing was slow and careful. "You wouldn't know that."

"Hah. But I do. A drummer was through here last week. He saw Martha Stevens in a restaurant in Valiance She owns it."

Dory said, "Thanks," and turned towards the door. Valiance was a 50 mile ride. But he had time, he was fired, he had all the time in the world.

Ellison yelled, "Come back here and tell me why—" His swearing hammered at Dory's ears as he went out of the door.

He found the restaurant in Valiance. It said Martha Stevens on the glass. It wasn't a bad-looking restaurant. Martha Stevens was a woman in her middle 30s. Her face was tired, and her hair a little unkempt. But traces of beauty still remained in her face, and she had a certain animal attractiveness. Dory sensed it before she opened her mouth.

She was bitter as she talked of George Stevens. But there was something else in her voice, too. It could have been fear.

She said sullenly, "How do I know why he left? He left me with all the bills and not a cent of money. We didn't even own the land."

Dory said softly, "You left town broke. Yet you came here and bought this restaurant a week after you arrived."

He saw the fear naked in her eyes. "I found out about it," he said quietly. He looked at her hands. They had tightened on the counter until the knuckles showed white.

"Why'd you kill your husband?" he shot at her. "For the money to start over here?"

Her face blanched, and he heard the audible suck of her breath. "I didn't," she said wildly. "I didn't. Somebody loaned me the money." She reached across the counter and grabbed Dory's arm. Her fingers bit deep. "You've got to believe me."

He studied her face. Fear put a certain ring in her voice. It could be truth. "Who loaned you the money?"

He didn't think she was going to answer, then the words came out so low he could barely hear them. "Doctor Campbell."

It hit him like a blow in the stomach. He had to stop and sort it out. Now, he could understand the expression in Doc Campbell's face. Tragedy mixed with fear would put that kind of a look on a man's face.

He said, "You'd been seeing Doc Campbell. And Stevens caught you together."

"He didn't." Terror made her voice tremble. "I just know one morning George wasn't there. I don't know what happened to him. Doctor Campbell thought it would be best for me to come here."

Dory searched her face. She didn't deny the rest of his accusation. She only denied knowing what had happened to Stevens. She suddenly covered her face with her hands, and her shoulders shook.

Dory watched her for a moment. He thought he had all she knew. He looked back from the door. She still sobbed softly.

HE FELT a deep, sickening unhappiness all the way back to town. It was midnight when he stopped before the Campbell house. The front of the house

was dark, and Dory wondered how he was going to wake Campbell without waking Letty. He moved around to the side of the house, and a light shone from the study window.

He tapped on the window and heard startled movement from inside. Then the window was cautiously raised, and Dory said gravely, "Doc? Dory. I've got to talk to you."

There was a long moment of silence, then Dory heard the doctor sigh. Campbell said, "I'll let you in the back, Dory."

Dory faced him in the study. He said slowly, "I just got back from Valiance. I talked to Martha Stevens."

He saw the fear-ridden expression in Campbell's eyes, saw his shoulders slowly sag. The man suddenly looked 20 years older.

"Yes?" Campbell said dully.

"That skull wasn't 50 years old, Doc. George Stevens has only been dead about a year. He caught you two together, didn't he, Doc?"

Campbell's breath was one long, escaping sigh. He said quietly, "I knew that someday—" His voice trailed off, then strengthened. "He didn't catch us together, Dory. But he found out about it." His eyes held a certain pleading. "I didn't know she was married at first. Then it didn't make any difference. A man gets lonely in the empty years. Stevens was drunk and quarrelsome when he came to me. Nothing I could say would calm him. He had a knife, Dory." A long shudder ran through Campbell, and Dory knew he was reliving the nightmare of that evening.

"I thought I got him out to Horse Canyon without anyone seeing me, but—" Campbell's shoulders straightened, and some of the haggard lines melted from his face. "I made a useless ride out there the other night, didn't I, Dory? But I thought if I could remove the rest of the bones and particles of what clothing might be left—" His voice was steady. "I'm glad it's over, Dory. For a year, I've been drained until I didn't know where to turn."

Dory's mind clicked the last piece into place. Fisher and Letty and Tim knew about the bones being in Horse Canyon. Certainly Letty and Tim wouldn't suggest to Doc Campbell that he ride out there. And Fisher had fired Dory because of his interest in the skull. Doc Campbell had said something about being drained—

Dory said with a wondering note in his voice, "So that's how Fisher managed to live so well. That explains why you permitted him to come here when you didn't seem to like him too well."

He saw the confirmation in Campbell's eyes and went on, fitting in the last detail. "He has a locked drawer at the office that he won't let anyone get near. What does he have in it?"

"The gun I used and Stevens's wallet. I thought often of killing Fisher." Campbell wearily shrugged. "Maybe I was afraid to try, or maybe one killing was enough of a load to carry."

Dory said, "We'll open that drawer before we see Fisher."

Campbell nodded with resigned acceptance.

Dory saw him look back at the house after they had gone a half block. He ached inside for the man.

THE street was deserted as they moved towards the office, yet the feeling persisted that malevolent eyes watched them. Dory tried to shrug it away. He was tired and under a strain.

The office was dark as Dory unlocked the door. Fisher had forgotten to ask for the key. He said, "Strike a match, will you, Doc?"

The flame made a feeble spot of radiance against the blackness. Dory pried at the desk drawer with the blade of his knife. He heard a sharp ejaculation from Campbell, and the match went out. He knew Campbell had burned his fingers. He waited patiently until Campbell struck another match.

He put more force into his prying and heard the little click as the lock gave. His hand was on the knob to pull the drawer open, when Fisher's voice snarled from the doorway, "You wouldn't let it alone, would you?"

He heard Campbell's startled cry and the scuff of his boots as he whirled. He straightened, his hand whipping to his gun. He wasn't going to be in time. He knew the dark bulk in the doorway already had a gun on them.

He heard the sullen boom of the gun and was momentarily blinded by the flash of flame. Campbell's agonized cry rang out. He had been hit and hard. He had been holding the match, and it made a perfect target for Fisher.

Dory's gun was in his hand as he vaguely heard the scrape of Campbell's broken steps. He fired once, and a return slug hummed evilly by his cheek. He felt the force of its passage plucking at him. He fired again and again, the echoes of his shots rolling into one crashing roar. He saw Fisher stagger back, then disappear out of sight. He heard thumping noises on the stoop, such as a man might make by beating his hands against it in agony. Then Campbell's labored breathing was the only sound.

Dory eased cautiously to the door. He stood at one side of it and peered out. He saw the boots first, toes turned up to the sky. They had a queer, inanimate quality, but he did not relax his caution until he saw the entire figure. He stepped outside and looked gravely down at Fisher's still face. Those hurried shots had been accurate. The span of a man's hand would cover the holes in Fisher's chest.

He heard startled cries up and down the street, saw lights flash on in various houses. In a moment, the noise of the shots would pull a crowd here.

He went back inside, and Campbell was lying on his back, his breath coming in queer, bubbling gasps. Dory lit a match and saw the bloody froth at the man's lips. Campbell clutched his stomach with both hands.

He tried to smile, and it came off as a horrible grimace. He gasped, "Better this way, Dory. Better—" His voice trailed away, and Dory thought he was gone. Then it picked up. "Letty—"

Dory bent over him. "You and I found out about Fisher killing Stevens. He shot you." It was hard to get the words out around the lump in his throat.

THAT was a smile on Campbell's face now, a peaceful smile, as though the hurt was all gone. He said, "Dory—" The rest faded, and Dory would never know what Campbell wanted to say.

He went down the street, passing the first of the running men. He said, "Fisher shot Doc Campbell. I'll be back."

He heard the man's wondering questions behind him and did not look around. He went steadily down the street, his mind trying to pick and choose words. How did you tell a girl her father had been killed? He did not know.

She was at the door, sleep still in her eyes. She asked in alarm, "Dory, did I hear shots? Father isn't here—"

She saw the gravity in his face, and her voice broke.

"Dory," she cried.

He nodded slowly, and her anguished cry hammered at his ears. He lifted his arms, and she rushed into them, clinging to him and sobbing brokenly. He awkwardly patted her hair and said, "Fisher killed him, Letty. Your father learned Fisher had murdered George Stevens. I tried, but I couldn't stop it. Fisher is dead, too."

He held her tight, letting the sobbing wear away. What was she thinking? He was afraid to know.

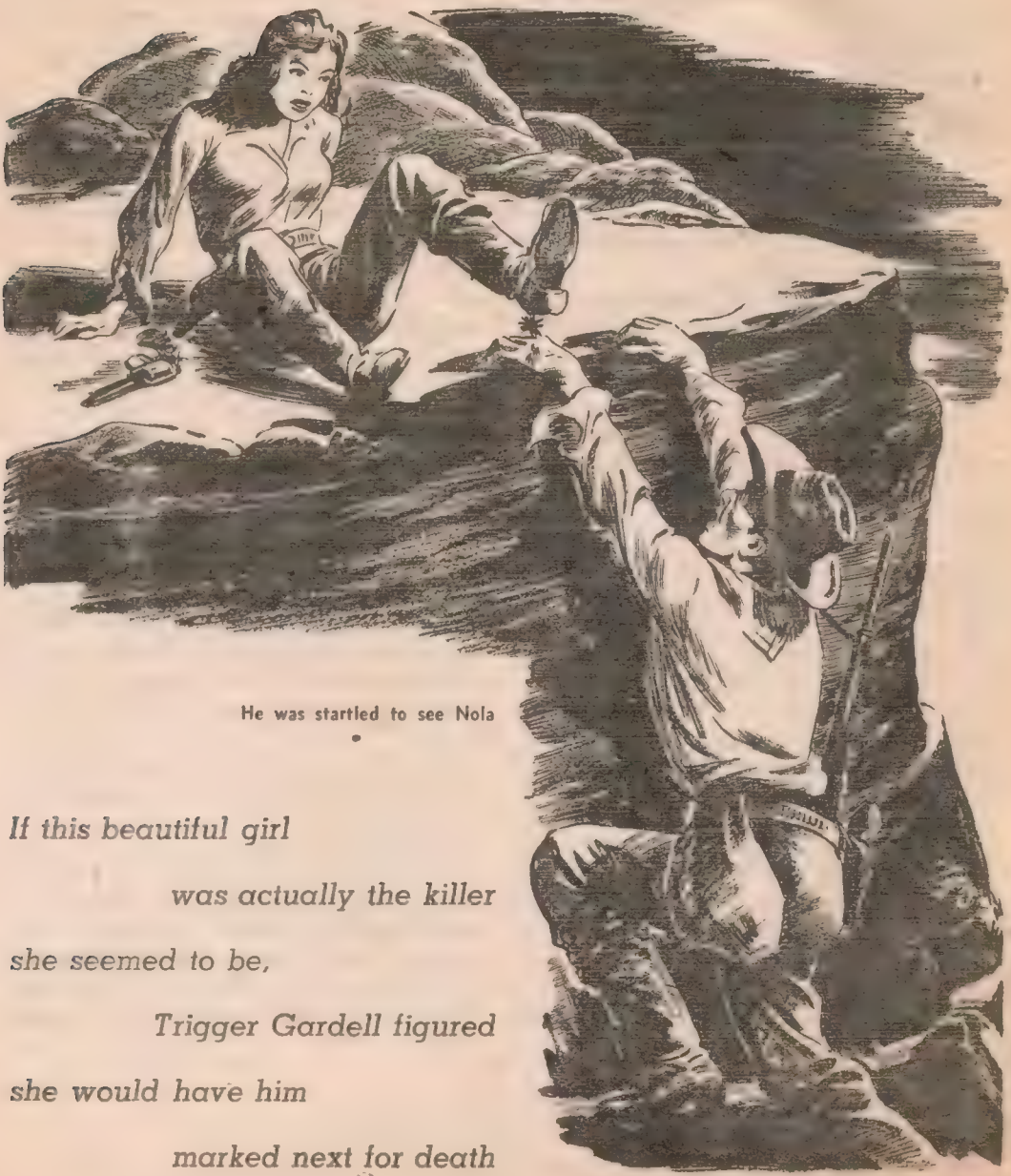
She lifted her face and said in a queer, little broken voice, "Dory, could we live at your place. I couldn't live here now—" She buried her face in his chest, and her sobbing started anew. There was almost a smile on his face. He knew with a certainty things were going to be all right.

Coming in Next Month's Issue

THROW LEAD OR DIE, a novelet by GILES A. LUTZ

A Complete Novelet

RIMROCK



He was startled to see Nola

If this beautiful girl
was actually the killer
she seemed to be,
Trigger Gardell figured
she would have him
marked next for death

REVENGE

By ROE RICHMOND

CHAPTER I

Waiting for Death

"HOW COME, Trigger?" inquired Packy Pelot. "You being so tough and all, you ain't broke out of this cracker-box jail?"

"Maybe it's Mom Husted's cookin'," Trig Gardell said in his soft easy voice. "That'd hold 'most any man."

"Hoot must be getting soft, pamperin' an outlaw like you," Pelot said, spitting tobacco juice at a brass cuspidor. "If I was sheriff I'd starve you gaunt as a backhill razorback."

Gardell smiled faintly. "If you was sheriff, Packy, I wouldn't be stayin' so long."

"Not alive, you wouldn't! You'd be under ground long before now, Gardell."

"You're right troublesome. Maybe I'll see you outside, sometime."

Packy Pelot laughed. "You ain't going outside, boy, till they take you up to the City to try you and string you up. You won't see nobody with that black hood on."

Trigger Gardell looked at the other deputy. "Take him away, Red. He's wastin' his breath."

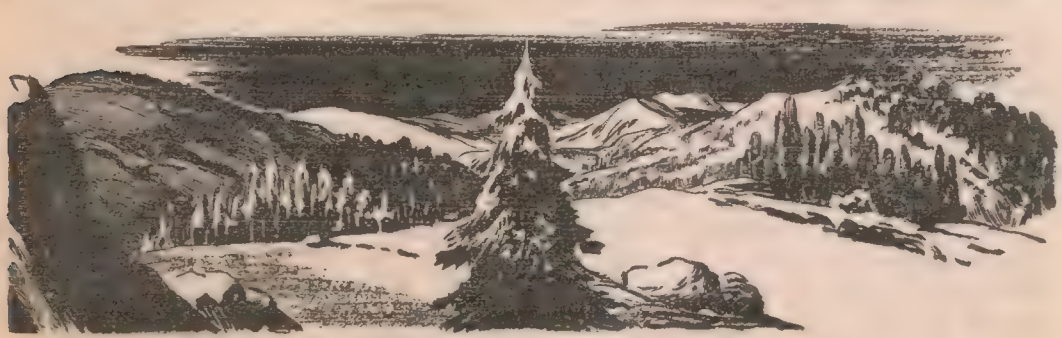
Red Tattam, a big lounging figure on the wall, shifted lazily and grinned. "Only fun Packy has lately's baitin' you, Trig. You sure there ain't somethin' besides Mom's cookin' keepin you in here?"

Pelot snorted. "Id like to see a jailbird steal *my* girl! If I was you, Red, I'd flog the ears off'n him twice a day."

"I don't hit a man when he's down," Red Tattam said. "And I don't figure he's stealin' anythin' for keeps. Nola just feels sorry for the boy, that's all."

"Take yourself away with Packy," Gardell suggested. "The worst part of bein' in jail is havin' to listen to deputies like you two."

They moved away from the cell block toward the front office, and Trig Gardell settled back on his bunk watching them go. Packy Pelot was enormously wide, squat and shuffling, sullen and surly, with an ugly thrusting head, a face that was cruel-eyed, vicious-mouthed and



brutal-jawed. Tattam towered above him, a big well-built swaggering man with curly red hair, dangerous amber eyes, and a ready laugh. A fancy dresser, Tattam, with a fondness for bright-colored shirts and scarfs, ornamented boots, gunbelt and holsters.

Trigger Gardell had been in the Englewood jailhouse so long he was like one of the family. He was held there for two reasons, which he half-suspected. First, because it was far enough removed from the scene of his major crimes to eliminate the threat of lynching parties. Second, to serve as bait and lure his two partners into a rescue try that would entrap them. The law was convinced that Coley Brush and Winfield Stroh, the other two members of this notorious trio, would never let Gardell languish long behind bars. But in six months time there had been no attempt to break him out, no sign of Brush and Stroh. Trigger knew the law wouldn't wait much longer. He'd soon be on his way to the gallows, for the trial would be merely a matter of form.

TRIGGER GARDELL was a medium-sized man in the middle twenties, trimly built, lithe and limber, with sandy brown hair, clear gray eyes, and a clean plain bronzed face. Quiet and pleasant, subdued and almost shy-acting, it was difficult to believe that he was an outlaw-killer, charged with nearly everything in the book. Bank robberies, stage and train hold-ups, and murder, to list a few, although there was little evidence to support the murder charge.

Sheriff Husted and his family had come to like Gardell during his confinement. The Husted home was next to the jail, and Husted took Gardell there to supper every evening now, on his wife's insistence. Mom Husted said Trig Gardell was the nicest boy she'd ever known, and if he'd done wrong he must have been driven to it. Nola, their adopted daughter, seemed inclined to agree with Mom, and the sheriff himself had a fatherly feeling toward Trigger. Husted was open to censure for such hospitable treatment of a badman, but he had the boy's word and considered it good enough.

The light faded at the small grilled windows as the afternoon waned. The jail was cleaner, better-kept than most, but the bars were no less oppressive—the iron wore into a man. To one who loved freedom as Gardell did, it was unbearable. He never could have stood it this long if the Husteds hadn't been so kind and friendly, if he didn't have Nola to look forward to at the end of each empty day.

Presently the sheriff came down the aisle, a large ring of keys in his hand, smiling at Gardell as he bent to unlock the cell door. Husted was a large man of fifty, beginning to put on weight but still vigorous and powerful, with thinning gray hair and a tobacco-stained gray mustache. There was iron under his habitual air of joviality and good nature. Hoot Husted had been a good lawman when Engelwood was wild and raw, a shooting sheriff in the old days. Gardell rose and walked toward him, saying:

"I'd better eat here, Hoot. Tonight—and after."

Husted straightened in surprise. "What's the matter, son? You tired of our company in the house?"

"You know it's not that," Gardell said. "The deputies are ridin' me some. I might get mad enough to break loose on 'em, Hoot."

"It ain't that either, Trig," said the sheriff. "You're thinkin' we'll be takin' a ride to the City."

"Maybe. It's got to some sometime."

Husted nodded heavily. "Yes, it has. But not for two weeks or so. You've got my word on that, Trig. Don't start disappointin' the womenfolks—just yet."

"All right, Hoot. I'll finish this week out. After that, I'm just a prisoner. And I'll be bustin' out—if I can."

The key grated. "Never make it, boy."

"Bound to try," Trigger Gardell said quietly. "I don't aim to hang, Hoot. I never killed anybody except in self-defense. As for robbin' banks and railroads, well, between them they stole all

the land us Gardells had. And we had a lot of it . . . once."

"I know, son. But you can't ever balance things up the way you tried to do it." Husted shook his gray head. "It don't work out, Trigger. You know how I feel about you, boy. I just hope it never comes to guns. I been in harness a good many years, Trig, and sense of duty gets to be part of a man. I'd have to shoot you."

"We'll hope it don't get to that, Hoot," said Gardell. "But after this week I don't want any favors, and you'll have to watch me."

"If you say so, Trig. You've been square, son. I wish you'd ride it out this way, but it's up to you."

"This way leads right to a rope," Trigger Gardell said. "I'd rather have bullets, if it's got to be one or the other."

"It looks like Brush and Stroh won't be comin' in, Trig."

"That's what it looks like," agreed Gardell. "Somethin' must've tripped those two boys."

"They'd be dead if they had tried it," Husted said simply.

"Maybe so. But they sure take a lot of killin', Hoot."

THEY went out the rear door, crossed to the house, and washed up at the outside sink. They were drying themselves on the rough towels when running feet sounded in the lane, and Husted's hand went automatically to the gun holstered on his right leg . . . It was a tow-headed fifteen-year-old kid named Tommy who had hung around, hero-worshipping Trigger Gardell when he was first locked up. He stopped near them, kicking the turf, awkward and embarrassed.

"Just wanted to see if you was all right, Trigger," he mumbled.

Gardell laughed. "Sure, Tommy, I'm fine. How's everythin' with you?"

"Pretty good, Trigger." The boy held out his hand and Gardell grasped it. "See you later, Trig." He turned and ran back into the alley toward the street. The two men laughed together, and Gardell was grateful that his laughter sounded easy and natural. For Tommy had left a tight-folded piece of paper in his hand, and Gardell knew instantly what it must be as he thrust both fists casually into his pockets.

The supper table was gay with a clean red-and-white checkered cloth, the plates, silver and glassware shining in the lamplight. Mom Husted, plump and jolly with her white hair and rosy cheeks, beamed at them all, and dark-haired blue-eyed Nola looked lovelier than ever tonight. Gardell, the paper burning through his pants, couldn't look at them without a deep hurting pang. This was the first homelike place he'd known since leaving his own years ago. Strange, that he had to go to jail to find it.

Gardell was even quieter than usual, and for once he scarcely tasted Mom's delicious fare, the tender roast beef with potatoes and rich brown gravy, the boiled onions, stewed tomatoes, golden biscuits, and homemade pickles, the strong fragrant coffee and sweet caramel cake. Gardell couldn't taste anything but freedom remembered and freedom to come—perhaps.

After the meal Husted gave him a cigar, lighted them both, and sank back into his favorite chair, while Mom washed the dishes and Gardell helped Nola wipe them. It had been exciting before, the girl's faintly perfumed presence, the nearness of her firm rounded body, the delicate strength of her fine-featured profile under the lustrous black hair, but tonight it was nothing. When his arm brushed hers, there was no electric thrill. When she spoke or laughed, nothing stirred responsively in Gardell. He was hundreds of miles away, straddling leather again, exulting in the power of horseflesh beneath him, the whip of the wind on his face, riding once more with Slim Stroh and Coley Brush.

"You haven't heard a word I said, Tremont," accused Nola with a light forced laugh.

"I'm sorry," Gardell said, flushing. "I —I guess I'm in a fog tonight, Nola."

"And no wonder!" cried Mom Husted.

"Shut up in that stinkin' jailhouse day and night. Hoot, why don't you let this boy out to get some fresh air and exercise, ride a horse or somethin'?"

The sheriff chuckled in the other room. "Mom, you want them to ride me right out of this job, I reckon."

When the dishes were finished and put away, Mom said: "Let's have some nice music now, Nola. Get on the piano, girl, and I'll get these two men to singin'."

Gardell shook his tawny head. "Not tonight, Mom. I—I don't feel like anythin' much but hittin' my bunk."

"That miserable jail's makin' you sick, Tremont," said Mom.

Nola looked hurt and disappointed, but said nothing. These evenings had come to mean a lot to her. She had lost interest in Red Tattam since Gardell's imprisonment, and her life lately centered on the hour or so each night that Gardell was in the house. They had never been alone together, except for a snatched few minutes now and then, but they had grown very close and communicated a great deal with their eyes.

Husted came out of the parlor, chewing his cigar and studying the young prisoner's face. Gardell said good night to the two women, and went out with the sheriff. They paused outside the back door of the jailhouse, scanning the starry sky and inhaling the fresh night air.

"You could get in trouble doin' this, Hoot," said Gardell.

"I won't," Husted said. "Unless you get away, Trig. And I got your word on that."

"Not after this week," Gardell told him. "Maybe not after tonight."

"You're gettin' pretty itchy and restless, son. You naturally would . . ." Husted spat hard on the ground. "But I got to see that you don't break out, boy."

"Sure, that's your job, Hoot," said Gardell. "I hate to cross you, but mine is to stay alive—if I can."

Husted swore under his breath and yanked the door open. When he locked Gardell into the cell, he said: "You got somethin' to read?"

"Yeah." Gardell gestured at the pile of tattered magazines and books. "I've got enough to last me a while, Hoot."

Left alone, Trigger Gardell got the folded paper out of his pocket and opened it behind an outspread magazine, recognizing Slim Stroh's penciled scrawl at once. The boys had come at last to spring him out from behind the bars. They were sorry to be so long, but it had been too hot to tackle before. Now they were ready to fight all the law in the Territory and everybody in the town of Engelwood, if necessary, to break their boy Trigger out of the calaboose.

CHAPTER II

The Prisoner Makes His Getaway

IT WAS to be Trig Gardell's last meal in the Husted home; the parole was over after this evening. Mom had outdone herself at the cookstove. The steaks were fried to medium-rare perfection in butter and onions, the baked potatoes mealy and white, the rolls light as feathers, the apple pie crusted golden and spiced with cinnamon and nutmeg. On the surface it was a gay festive banquet, but it had the undercurrent of sadness common to farewell parties. When it was over Hoot Husted lit a cigar and pushed back, not offering one to Gardell. He waved a big hand toward the parlor and said:

"I'll help Mom with the dishes. You folks go on in there and rest easy."

"Well, I declare!" Mom said. "First time Hoot's volunteered like that since his courtin' days."

Gardell and the girl moved into the front room, hand in hand and laughing together, but once alone they sobered into silence. The parlor was crowded with comfortable chairs, tables, lamps, a sofa. On the piano top were framed photographs, the subjects stiff and unnatural: the wedding day picture of Mom and Hoot; the son who had been killed at

Vicksburg, the little girl who died in the typhoid epidemic. They regarded the photographs at length.

"You're going to try and get away, Tremont?" Nola said, after a space.

He nodded, dimly embarrassed as always by the use of his proper Christian name.

"You won't hurt—you won't *let* Hoot get hurt?"

"I couldn't throw down on him," Gardell said simply. "I'll do my best to see that nobody else does, Nola."

"He's a wonderful man, Tremont. He and Mom are both fine . . . They've been so good to me, Trem."

"Me, too. They don't come any better."

Nola turned suddenly and faced him squarely, gripping his arms. "But I want to go with you, Trem. I've got to go with you!"

"You can't, Nola." He stared at her in surprise. The lamplight made a soft sheen on her smooth black hair. Her brilliant blue eyes were large and deep, lighted as never before, and her face was so pure and lovely it hurt him to look at it . . . "There's no place for a woman. You've got to forget—me and everythin'."

"Not in this world, Tremont," she said gravely. "Tell me then, how can I find you . . . afterward?"

Gardell shook his head slowly. "There's no way, Nola."

"There's got to be a way! Can't you see, Trem? My life'll be nothing without you. Not worth living, and I won't want to live."

"You just think that," he protested. "It'll pass, Nola."

The girl came closer and lifted her face. "Kiss me, Tremont," she said softly.

HIS ARMS went gently around her. It started cool and chaste, but the pressure and fire increased swiftly. It ended up in a riot of storming blood and clamoring flesh, the embrace of a man and woman in love. Nola pushed slightly back and gazed up at him.

"Tell me now, Trem. Where can I come to you?"

"There's nothin' sure about this," Gardell murmured, still somewhat unwilling. "The Continental Hotel in Ackworth. The manager's a friend of mine. He might know where I am, if I'm still around."

Nola repeated the name of the hotel and town. "I'll find you," she murmured, with quiet womanly assurance.

They broke apart as the Husteds came in, Hoot clearing his throat in noisy warning. They talked for a half hour, then Nola played the piano, and Mom led the men in singing. Trigger Gardell's eyes smarted and his throat ached, when it came time to say good night—perhaps goodby. The eyes of both women were shining wet as Gardell kissed them, lightly and quickly, and Mom whispered, "God bless you, boy." Nola said nothing, but her eyes promised him the world and life everlasting.

The men were silent until Husted was locking the cell door. "I'm sorry it's come to this, Trig," he said dully.

"It had to, Hoot," said Gardell. "Maybe it'll turn out all right—all the way around."

"We've enjoyed havin' you with us, son."

Gardell nodded and reached through the bars to press the older man's shoulder "I guess you know, Hoot, what it's meant to me."

HUSTED and Packy Pelot were alone in the sheriff's office at the front of the jailhouse when the two strangers walked in, sober-faced men in dark suits, quiet and dignified-acting. Red Tattam and a squad of special deputies had been called out of town to investigate a report on cattle rustlers. The broad dark man showed Husted a U.S. Marshal's badge, the tall fair one displayed the shield of a deputy marshal, and the former handed the sheriff an official document. The paper crackled as Husted unfolded and read it carefully, then looked up at the two visitors.

"We didn't expect this for a couple of weeks yet, Marshal."

"It's been hangin' fire long enough.

Brush and Stroh've been located down in Mexico. A good time to settle Gardell's case."

"You'll want a posse along though?"

The stocky man waved toward the center of town. "Brought one with us, Sheriff. Gardell won't be gettin' away from us."

"Well, everythin' seems to be in order," Husted said. "I reckon you can take the boy whenever you're ready. Just a minute though. I had somethin' here I wanted to send to Judge Flynn." Husted riffled through the thick sheaf of papers on his desk, searching for a certain bulletin. For some reason he was vaguely suspicious about this deal, even though the badges were genuine, the legal papers authentic in every detail, the signatures recognizable. Still some warning instinct nagged persistently at him.

Husted finally found what he was seeking, his eyes skimming over it, his left hand holding other mnuscripts to screen it from the view of the marshals. The pictures were blurred, distorted, useless, but the descriptions were fairly clear:

> "Coley (Choctaw) Brush, 31, 5 feet, 9 inches, 190 pounds . . . Black hair with some gray, dark eyes and complexion, scarred face . . . Winfield (Slim) Stroh, 27, 6 feet or taller, 175 pounds . . . Blond hair, blue eyes, light complexion . . ."

"Well, I can't find it," muttered Husted, shoving the papers away, dropping his right hand casually toward the gun on his thigh, and looking up, the smile freezing on his face as he stared into the muzzle of a .44 Colt in the big square hand of Coley Brush. Backed to the wall by Winfield Stroh's gun, Packy Pelot already had his hands elevated.

"You're a mighty suspicious man, Sheriff," said Brush. "Stand up and don't reach, Husted, on account of Trigger don't want you shot up any. Now drop your belts, both of you."

Fumbling with his belt buckle, Husted glanced out the windows and saw heavily-armed horsemen all around the jailhouse now. Stroh picked up the belts, thrusting Husted's gun under his waistband, retaining Pelot's belt with the two .44's for Trigger Gardell.

"All right, turn Trigger loose now, Husted," said Brush, and gestured at Pelot. "Get along with him, frog-face." Brush prodded them to the rear of the building where the cells were, and Trig Gardell, the only inmate, grinned at him.

"OLD CHOCTAW," Gardell said. "It's about time! And howdy, Slim."

"Had to turn rustlers to get in here today," Brush grumbled. "They've had an army of deputies around this sinkhole for months. Open up, Husted, then you and froggy here get inside."

Trigger Gardell stepped out, the two officers moved into the cell, and Brush locked the door on them, sliding the key ring into his coat pocket. Stroh handed over Pelot's gun-belt, and Gardell strapped it about his flat hips, smiling at the furious Pelot.

"Sorry about this, Hoot," said Gardell seriously. "But they can't hang you for it, and they sure had a rope waitin' for me. Tell Mom and Nola goodby for me, Hoot."

"All right, Trig," Husted said without emotion. "But you boys probably won't get very far."

"Come on, Trigger," said Stroh. "Our horses'll be out back. I don't wanta see you sheddin' tears over leavin' this place."

They moved toward the rear door, Stroh and Gardell in the lead with Brush walking after them. Husted leaned on the bars with outspread hands, chewing his tobacco stolidly and watching them go. Packy Pelot stood behind the sheriff's broad bulk, his face uglier than ever. With a sudden movement Pelot pulled another gun from under his left arm, stepping close to Husted's back and aiming through the bars.

Warned by some sixth sense, acquired by the hunted, Coley Brush spun around and saw the menacing gun barrel and let go a blast from his own Colt. The shot roared deafeningly in the enclosed space. Husted grunted and swayed back from the impact, dropping his right arm to knock Pelot's gunhand down. "You

damn fool!" Husted panted. Pelot's gun exploded into the floorboards. "No, Choctaw!" yelled Trigger Gardell, but Brush's .44 was already blazing a second time.

Husted heaved backward with a groan, carrying Packy Pelot over and down in under him. Husted drew up his knees, straightened out stiffly, went limp and shapeless on the floor of the cell, with Pelot cowering half under and behind him. Brush threw one more shot and followed his two companions out the back door.

"You killed him, Choctaw," moaned Trig Gardell, horror in his gray eyes.

"It was him or me, Trig," said Brush.

"It was that damn Pelot behind Hoot," Gardell said bitterly.

Winfield Stroh cursed them both. "Mount up and ride! We ain't got all day!"

They were in the saddle with a whole company of horsemen, riding across the backyard toward open country and the rolling hills, when Mom Husted burst out of the shed next door, screaming with a shotgun in her hands. "No, Mom, *no!*" Gardell shouted, almost splitting his throat, but Mom was already touching off one barrel with a thunderous burst, the heavy charge flinging the nearest rider from his saddle, all but torn in two.

Still screaming, Mom swung the shotgun in Stroh's direction, but Slim Stroh's right hand flashed and his six-gun flared before she could unleash the second barrel. Mom Husted stumbled backward and sat down ponderously, wagging her silvery head in the sunshine, surprise on her plump pink-cheeked face. Then, as if very tired, Mom lay back in the grass, her white head on the edge of the little flower garden she cultivated with such pleasure and pride. As the cavalcade swept on, Nola Husted ran out of the house and knelt beside Mom in the billowing sunshot dust.

"Both of 'em," Trigger Gardell said, his face drained and ghastly, his gray eyes tortured and stricken. "*Both of 'em dead!*"

"I didn't want to do it, Trig," said Slim Stroh. "But you saw what that buckshot did to Johnson," he argued.

"I know, Slim, I know," Gardell said brokenly. "You couldn't help it, Slim. Choctaw couldn't help it either. But what a thing to have happen. What a hell of a thing!"

"It's too bad, kid," said Slim Stroh. "But it ain't any ways your fault, that I can see."

"I wish I'd stayed in there," Gardell murmured. "I would of, if I'd known."

"Don't talk foolish, boy," remonstrated Chotcaw Brush. "When a man's time comes he dies, that's all. Their time had come and yours hasn't, Trigger. Buck up and let's do some ridin' here."

"The whole damn country'll be up after us," Stroh drawled. "But it's been up before and we're still ridin'. Don't it seem good to fork a horse again, Trig?"

"It would," Trig Gardell said, "if things had gone different back there in Engelwood."

CHAPTER III

Reunion with Nola

A YEAR later, after a sojourn south of the Rio Grande, they were back north of the Border, moving from Laredo up to Ackworth, in the foothills of the Choctaw Peaks, just the three of them left together. Returning alone one afternoon to their hideout in the basement of the Continental Hotel, Trigger Gardell sensed a strange presence the moment he opened the door, and his right-hand gun was out when he saw Nola Husted sitting quietly on one of the three bunks in the dusky gloom of the room. She had matured in a year, her fine face showing the grief and loss she had suffered. Nola couldn't have loved the Husteds any more, if they had been her own parents. He sheathed his gun, numb from the shock.

"Why, Nola," Gardell said huskily. "What are you doin' here?"

"I told you I'd come, Tremont."

"Yes, but—Have you been all right, Nola?"

"As well as I could be. They left me all they had, so I didn't starve. Or have to go to work waiting on tables . . . yet."

This girl had changed, Gardell realized. There was a new streak in her, hardness or bitterness, a mixture of both maybe. She wasn't as demure and gentle as she had been, but lovelier than ever in her new self-reliance and strength.

"Did you hear . . . how it happened?" he asked.

"I *saw* it happen to Mom," she said. "I have Pelot's version of what happened in the jailhouse."

"Pelot!" said Gardell harshly. "If it hadn't been for Pelot nothin' would've happened there." And he told her, quickly and concisely, what had transpired on the day of the jail-break.

"That sounds better than Packy's story," Nola admitted. "But it seems as if you could have done *something,* Trem . . ."

"I know it, Nola," he said miserably. "There hasn't been a day I haven't thought about it. But after Pelot pulled that gun it happened fast, Nola, there wasn't any time."

Nola nodded in partial understanding, at least. "I guess you've paid enough, Tremont. It shows clearly in your face and eyes."

"I thought you'd hate me, of course."

"I did, I think—for a while."

Gardell crossed and sat down next to her on the bunk, shy as a boy and careful not to touch her yet. "Then—you don't any more?"

"No, Trem. I'll always love you, I'm afraid . . . No matter what you do." There was resignation in her tone and her expression.

"It won't make you very happy, I reckon."

She laughed with a brittle note of strain. "To love an outlaw, a killer? Would that make any woman happy?"

"They say it has," Gardell said with a sad smile. "But most likely not a woman like you, Nola."

The girl shrugged "I'm no different from any woman in love. Aren't you going to kiss me, Trem?"

TIME and sorrow, loneliness and pain, dropped away as they held one another, burned away under the sweet racing fire of their reunion . . . They were still in each other's arms when the door opened, and the other two men came in, removing their hats and standing in awkward surprise. Trigger Gardell rose and faced them, introducing the girl, knowing that they had identified her at once, and did not approve at all. Especially Choctaw.

Coley Brush nodded a curt acknowledgment, standing broad and powerful with hands on hips, his dark face rugged and scarred, his eyes black and smouldering. "You told her about this place, Trig? That wasn't very smart, boy."

"You needn't worry," Nola said coolly. "I haven't told anyone, and I won't. I'm in love with Tremont, you see."

"There's no room for it in our line of work, miss," Brush said.

Winfield Stroh, tall, slender and graceful, his blond head tilted, blue eyes bright and merry, a charming smile on his lean good-looking face, waved a careless hand. "Don't be so hard, Choctaw. A pretty girl brightens things up considerable. And this calls for a drink." Stroh went to the corner table and started pouring whiskey into glasses.

Trigger Gardell was still standing, staring straight at Brush. "If you want us to get out, Choctaw," he said softly, "we'll go."

Brush smiled bleakly. "It's not that easy, Trig. Sit down, boy, we've got to talk things over a little. You see, Tattam and Pelot are in town, with a posse."

"They are?" Nola Husted cried, sharp and incredulous "But how—"

Trigger Gardell, gone rigid and stark, looked down at the girl with pale fire flickering in his gray eyes. "So, that's why you came, Nola? . . . I suppose they're outside waitin' for you to give the sign."

"Don't be a fool, they can't know you're here," Nola protested. "I didn't bring them,

Tremont. Either they trailed me, or it's just accidental."

"You all got here about the same time," Gardell said.

Her eyes blazed at him. "Do you think I'd do anything like that to you? Haven't you got any faith in me, Trem?"

"Why, yes, Nola . . . But it sure looks funny."

"In a mighty serious way," Brush added grimly.

Stroh, smiling and humming a tune, was distributing drinks, but Nola declined hers.

"What do we care how they got here?" Stroh asked the room at large. "All we got to do is hit into the Choctaws." He clapped Brush on the back. "With this Indian here we'll lose 'em awful fast!"

Brush shook his gray-flecked dark head. "You talk too much, Slim."

"I'll go with you," Nola said. "If you're afraid I'll talk."

"That's all we need now," Brush remarked with irony.

"I call it a good idea," grinned Slim Stroh. "I'm tired of lookin' at you two hombres all the time. Miss Husted's real restful on the eyes." He raised his glass to her, and she smiled gravely back at him.

"I don't know," Trigger Gardell said. "This sure beats me."

Brush was thoughtfully tapering up a cigarette. "Take the girl if you want to, Trig," he said at last. "Whatever we do, we'll move out tonight. That's a big hungry lookin' posse them deputies got."

"I'd like to get a crack at that Packy Pelot," Gardell said.

Coley Brush, in one of his sudden changes of mood, laughed in a way that transformed and illuminated his somber dark face amazingly. "We'll get a crack at all of them, up there in the Peaks," he announced. "And they won't see hide nor hair of us."

"That's the old Choctaw I love talkin' now!" said Slim Stroh.

"Shut up, Winfield," said Brush. "And go upstairs and tell 'em to make it four suppers instead of three."

CHAPTER IV

Justice on the Trail

ALL four of them had been in the mountains a month now, and that posse was still clinging tenaciously to their trail, despite the losses inflicted by the deadly sharp-shooting of Brush, Stroh and Gardell. Long before this they had expected to shake off the pursuit, for Coley Brush had derived his nickname of Choctaw from his uncanny knowledge of this vast mountain wilderness. But somehow the enemy stuck, and for a time Brush watched Nola Husted with hawk-like vigilance, in an attempt to catch her marking trails and leaving signs for the posse.

Their supplies were running out, but it was possible to shoot game and birds and catch fish. Coley Brush was an expert at these crafts, and the others learned from him, even Nola. The girl, patient and uncomplaining under endless danger and hardships, gradually won the respect and admiration of all three men. Slim Stroh was clearly in love with her, and even Brush had grown fond of Nola. While it was understood she belonged to Trigger Gardell, he did not begrudge the others their moments with the girl.

Gardell believed that the pursuit was directly traceable to Packy Pelot's hatred for him and Red Tattam's desire for Nola Husted. There were occasions when Nola's presence saved them from inner strife and dissension. With nerves worn thin and raw from being ceaselessly hunted and hounded, the men might have fought among themselves at times, when either Brush or Stroh openly blamed Gardell for their predicament. But Nola was always there to soothe and calm injured feelings.

Although the pursuers never quite got within striking distance, they succeeded in pushing their quarry ever higher into the Choctaw Range, until the hardwood

forests were left far below, and sometimes even the stunted pines of the timberline were beneath their course. Turn, twist and double as they would, making use of all the hidden tortured passes that Brush knew, the four in flight were never entirely away from the bloodhound pack at their heels. In final desperation they began to increase the pressure of their sniping warfare from above, to slow, harass and cut down the pursuit.

ON THIS DAY, forced above the timberline once more, they were climbing a steep narrow shelf that girded the sheer naked wall of a towering cliff, high among the fantastic spires and domes of the craggy Choctaw Peaks. The ascending ledge varied in width from five to ten feet, its surface rough and treacherous, lying in the full blinding glare of the afternoon sun. Saddle girths frothed white and clothing was soaked with sweat as they toiled upward, the cliff rising precipitously on their left, dropping vertically away for hundreds of feet on their right. At intervals long range shots from below whined harmlessly off the stone face beneath them.

Coley Brush led the way, hoping that the rim would not peter out and prove him a liar, knowing that it would lead them to safety unless a fairly recent slide had wiped out the trail. There were places so narrow that the horses snorted and shrank back in terror, but they could be led across these. Below him clambered Nola Husted and Slim Stroh, while bringing up the rear was Trigger Gardell, his rifle ready to discourage the sheriff's party from mounting the shelf. Twice he had driven them back to cover.

The sun blazed on them with hideous heat, refracted from the rock with dazzling brilliance, and breathing in the thin hot air was an agonizing effort. Gardell felt glued to his saddle, the leather searing him to the bone, and the rifle was almost too hot to hold. Hatbrim low over aching eyes, he watched the back-trail and yearned for the dark green coolness of the pines far below.

The clear singing voice of Winfield Stroh floated down from above, and Gardell wondered how Slim could do it in this inferno:

"He was only a lavender cowboy,
And the hairs on his chest were but two-oo,
But he wanted to follow the gunmen,
And fight like the he-men do-oo . . ."

Gardell smiled at the undauntable gayety of Slim Stroh, and then his smile faded as Nola's pleased appreciative laugh drifted to his ears. The girl seemed to like the other two men unreservedly now, nearly as much as she liked him, and Gardell wondered if she were falling under the spell of Stroh's charm. It would be easy for any woman to love Slim Stroh, he thought.

But Gardell wasn't really jealous. Slim and Choctaw were like brothers to him, closer than most blood brothers, because they had ridden and fought together through the hell-for-leather years. If Nola should choose one of them, he would accept it as best he could, but any other man he'd want to kill.

On a broad level stretch Nola and Stroh were riding side by side, the girl in near the wall and Slim out next to the rim. Glancing over the edge, Gardell thought it must be a thousand-foot drop to boulders and shale at the bottom of the cliff, and suddenly dizzy and sick he pulled back and urged his horse to the inside.

For a brief moment the others were out of sight as Gardell breasted a rise, and in that brief space he heard the clash of panicky hoofs and Nola's loud terrified cry.

Clearing the incline, Gardell went numb with horror as he saw Slim Stroh's bay mare bucking and pitching in a frenzy on the very rim of the chasm.

Even as he watched, the horse went screaming over the side, and Slim Stroh flung himself from the saddle, too late to land on the ledge but barely in time to catch the rimrock, hang there stunned and breathless by his hooked elbows and clawing hands. Nola swung down and ran toward him. Gardell drove his mount

forward. From far below came the muted sliding crash as the bay mare struck the base of the cliff.

"Hang on, Slim!" yelled Gardell, jumping down with his rope and racing toward the edge, where Nola was crouched over Stroh.

BUT SLIM had held on as long as was humanly possible, his hands and arms were slipping slowly, dragged by the weight of his rangy body. Gardell glimpsed his blond head, golden in the sunlight, and the strained lean face, the muscles corded on the jawbones. He heard the scraping of fingernails on stone, saw Slim turn his head, smile fleetingly. Then Nola shut off his view, made it impossible to throw the rope, and Slim Stroh was gone with a sudden rush, and Nola was screaming her throat raw with a sound that froze Gardell's blood and made the hair rise on his scalp.

Nola came blindly into his arms, sobbing hysterically and beating her hands on his chest. Gardell drew her away from the rim, gently but firmly, and held her securely in his arms against the rock wall, his own heart hammering in hollow aching despair, his mind clamped in an icy cold-steel vise.

Coley Brush came back down the trail and dismounted, his sun-blackened face bleaker than ever, jaws set like iron and eyes burning with anguish.

"How in the name of—? How did that ever happen?"

"I don't know, I don't know," sobbed Nola, twisting her head from side to side against Gardell's damp shoulder.

"The bay started buckin', Coley," said Gardell. "Like she was crazy or stung or hurt."

"Well, nothin' to do but push along," Brush said, all the life gone from his voice.

"He was smiling," Nola moaned, rubbing her face into Gardell's sweaty shirt. "Trying to smile. . ."

Gardell stroked her quivering back. "Sure, that's Slim," he said softly. "That's the way Slim would want you to see him go."

CHAPTER V

A Brush with Death

COLEY BRUSH grew aloof and remote in the days that followed, losing interest in all things, eating but scantily. He no longer spoke to Nola Husted, scarcely seemed aware of her presence, and he had very little to say to Trigger Gardell. Withdrawn into himself, dark and brooding, cold and silent, it was as if he blamed Nola, or both of them, for what had happened to Winfield Stroh. The four had been a compact unit; the three that were left were widely separated, isolated, without feeling or communication. Nola felt Gardell drifting away from her, too, leaving her alone and unwanted. She began to wish that the posse would close up, a bullet hit her, take her out of the cheerless lonely misery of this existence.

Brush's indifference forced Gardell to assume the leadership, and he didn't know the country like Choctaw did. They labored and blundered now, where before they had traveled freely and smoothly. Disintegration had started, they were breaking up from within, the situation was becoming unendurable, and it seemed simply a matter of time before they all went under. Coley Brush hated them and the whole world. He didn't care any more where they went, what they did, whether they lived or died.

Sometimes at night, Trigger Gardell woke with a jerk, sweating cold and trembling, certain that Choctaw was ready to turn his guns on them, kill them in their sleep. There was murder in the man, and a touch of madness. Brush had turned into a stranger, a gaunt bitter enemy that Gardell didn't know at all.

In the beginning Gardell had tried to talk him out of it. "We feel as bad as you do, Choctaw. We miss Slim as much as anybody could. There's no use actin' this way, Coley. We're all in it together. . ." But Coley Brush refused to answer, and

Gardell soon gave it up as hopeless.

Every night Gardell expected to wake up with a gun blasting in his ears, and see Brush standing over the girl's body, ready to throw down on him next. Every morning he thought that Brush might have gone during the dark hours, but he was always there, bearded to the fiery eyes now, cold, black and unrelenting in his silent fury and hate. And always the pursuit was in back of them, not close enough yet to attack but near enough to keep them running, running and hiding forever.

They came to a place in the mountains where a slender wooden foot bridge hung precariously suspended over a deep rocky gorge in which white water boiled in a torrent among jagged boulders, maybe a hundred feet below the frail arch. Ancient ropes were strung across to afford handholds on either side of the flimsy structure. The planks looked half-rotted, with here and there fragments broken off. Brush said it was the only crossing for miles, they'd have to risk it.

After a careful study and testing, Gardell decided it would bear the weight of one horse at a time perhaps, but no more than that. Putting a rope on his chestnut. Gardell walked daintily across the swaying span, then teased the gelding along after him with the rope. The bridge creaked and groaned ominously under the horse's weight, jerking and bouncing crazily, but it held. The process was repeated with the other two mounts. Each time it seemed as if the crude worn-out structure would collapse and dump the animal screaming into the cool misty depths, but somehow it stayed intact.

"Come on, Nola!" Gardell shouted over the roar of the water. "It's all right." And he turned inland with the horses.

NOLA advanced with slow reluctant tread, grasping the ropes at either side, feeling faint and giddy as the worn slats yielded under her boots and the bridge swayed from one side to another, rising and falling with a sickening motion. There was a heavy lurch then, as Brush put his weight on the crumbling wood to follow her, and Nola screamed at him in sudden panic:

"No, no! Wait till I get across."

"What for?" demanded Coley Brush, laughing with mockery. "If it holds horses, I reckon it'll hold us."

"Please wait," she pleaded, dizzy with the heaving of the arch, nauseated by the foaming rock-fringed depths beneath her feet. "I'm afraid, Coley!"

Brush came on with a careless heavy stride, making the boards shudder and jump. "Go on, girl, go on," he said impatiently. He was close behind her now, the bridge sagging under their combined weight, the ropes springing as if to tear themselves out of her gripping hands.

Nola took a quick frightened step, and a slat splintered softly, sloughed away under her toe. Crying aloud in terror, she leaped backward, felt her sharp Spanish spurs rip into cloth and strike hard against flesh-and-bone. Brush cursed loudly at the stabbing pain, stumbling backward. Turning to apologize, Nola saw the fear in his eyes as his broad shoulders fell upon the left-hand rope. She let go with her left hand, instinctively, just as the rotten hemp parted with a dull report, snaking out either way from the man's toppling body. Coley Brush fell backward, his open mouth a ragged red-and-white hole in the black beard, his eyes fixed on the girl with hate, fury and accusation. "Killer!" he roared, and was gone in a hurtling rush. Nola shut her eyes, but she couldn't close her ears to the sodden smash of his body on the boulders down there.

On shaking legs Nola crept the rest of the way across the gorge, clinging with both hands to the remaining guide-rope, tumbling half-conscious as soon as she reached the safety of solid ground on the other side.

Trigger Gardell came back and stood beside her shuddering form, staring at the broken rope and the water seething white among the black-toothed rocks a hundred feet below. There was no sign of the brawny shattered body of Coley Choctaw Brush. After a while Gardell knelt on the pine needles beside the girl.

"What did he do out there, Nola? What were you yellin' for?"

"He — he scared me," she panted. "I told him to wait, but he came right behind me. Then he leaned on the rope and it snapped."

"You're sure a hard luck girl to travel with," Gardell said, smiling a thin crooked smile. "Well, there's still two of us. I hope I'm not the next."

Nola looked up at him with wild wet eyes, searching his solemn face and shaking her head. Gardell smiled gently at her then, caressing the rich dark hair.

"Stay there and rest, try not to think about—anythin'," he said quietly. "I'm goin' to cut that bridge loose from this end. Wouldn't want Packy or Red or any of them boys to get hurt, tryin' to cross that ramshackle old thing."

Trigger Gardell recalled what Coley Brush had said about men dying when their time came. It sure looked as if Coley was right, and the times came in odd and unexpected ways. But losing Coley today was not like losing the friend and comrade he had been in the past. The real Choctaw that Trig knew had gone when Slim Stroh plunged to his death on that sun-blasted cliff. A terrible loneliness gripped Trigger Gardell as he worked to unmoor the bridge-end. With the Husteds, Slim and Choctaw dead, there was nobody left that mattered. No one but Nola, and he wasn't sure about her any more.

FOR a week there had been only a handful of men after them, only the few who had taken the ruined foot bridge and the long detour in determined stride. Now there were only two of the posse left, two that were close enough to count anyway. Trigger Gardell had been watching them all day from the blunt-topped pinnacle of rock overlooking the broken summit, on which he and Nola had come to rest. Packy Pelot and Red Tattam were the two, of course. As soon as the girl went to sleep tonight, Gardell was going down after them. Packy had been responsible for the deaths of Hoot and Mom Husted, and together they had indirectly brought on the end of Slim Stroh and Choctaw Brush. Gardell wanted Packy Pelot in particular. He hadn't forgotten how Pelot used to taunt him daily about the hangman's noose.

Gardell and the girl were reaching the limit of their endurance, the breaking point was at hand. They hadn't eaten regularly for many days, often they spent hours of torment without water, and it was beginning to tell on them. Their canteens were full now, but they had no food. It was time for a showdown with the two men below. Pelot had succeeded Husted as the sheriff of Engelwood County, and Tattam was his number one deputy, but the vindictiveness of their mission was a personal thing.

When he was positive Nola was soundly asleep, Trigger Gardell slipped out of camp on foot, wearing Pelot's pair of six-guns and carrying his Spencer .50 carbine. He chose a circuitous back route to clamber down, because the front of the butte was a steep cliff, bare and open to the moonlight. The moon, nearly at the full, was like a great white beacon over the mountains, flooding the naked peaks and crests with silvery fire, glistening on the dark forested slopes that stretched below. Gardell had the advantage of knowing about where the enemy was, while they had lost his trail on the stone surfaces of the highland wilderness. They would pick it up tomorrow—if they lived. But Gardell elected to strike on his own initiative tonight. His turn to do some hunting.

A small sheltered fire burned low in the rocky basin the lawmen had selected for a campsite. Crawling closer, Gardell saw three picketed horses, one for packing provisions, a man sleeping in his blankets and another sitting back on guard in the shadow of a pine. Firelight glinting on a red thatch of hair indicated that Tattam was asleep in the bowl, so Packy Pelot must be the man on sentry. Trigger Gardell could have shot them both without exposing himself, but he never had killed that way and he never would.

"Packy," he called clearly. "Come on out. You was always braggin' what you'd

do to me when you got me outside."

Packy Pelot scrambled for cover, chucked a pebble at the long sleeping form of Red Tattam. "Get up, Red! He's out there!"

Trigger Gardell laughed. "That's not nice, Packy. I wanted to get you in a fair stand-up fight. Now I'll have to take you your way. Don't move, Red, or I'll drill you!"

Red Tattam sat up bewildered, grumbling and digging at his sleepy eyes, awake enough to comprehend his danger and remain seated there.

"Stay right there, Red," said Packy Pelot, and raised his voice: "Any way you want it, Gardell. I'll come without a rifle. We'll start even with the six-guns."

"You're a better man than I thought, Packy," Gardell told him. "I'm checkin' my carbine. Walk out this way."

"You could take me from cover."

"Don't be a damn fool! I could of taken you both that way."

"All right, Gardell, I'm comin' out. Get out where I can see you, man!"

"Don't worry, Packy. I'll give you first move."

CHAPTER VI

Two Against One

TRIGGER GARDELL laid down the Spencer and left the shelter of spruce-shaded boulders, stepping into the open, walking to meet the short squat figure of Packy Pelot, coming out from the basin. They paced carefully toward one another in radiant moonlight, striped and stippled with black shadows, their boots crunching in gravel and scraping on stone as they slowly closed the gap. Fifty yards separated them now, and they kept coming on.

A rifle barked and blazed from the fire-lit rocky bowl behind Pelot. Gardell hit the ground as lead screeched close, and rolled swiftly into the shadow of a pillar of sandstone.

"Damn you, Red, keep out of it!" Pelot yelled peevishly. "You want to get me killed out here?"

Red Tattam laughed. "What the hell is it—a game?"

"Guess we'll have to do it Indian fashion," Gardell called. "Get down, Packy, before I drop you cold!"

"Red won't shoot again," Pelot protested. "Hear me, Red! You hold your fire now!"

"Sure, chief," Tattam said cheerfully. "You boys go ahead and play your hands out."

"I must be crazy to trust you two," Gardell said, half-disgusted.

"I'm tryin' to play it square, ain't I?" Pelot demanded. "Come on, gunman, just you and me."

"All right, I'm comin' up," Trigger Gardell said, and moved back into the open, walking forward in even measured strides, concentrating with cold cruel intensity on the monstrous broad shape of Packy Pelot. He could see the sullen ugliness of the man now, the evil thrust of the head, the brutal bulge of the jaws.

Thirty yards, perhaps a bit less, and both men came to a stop and set their boots, standing poised and alert, waiting and ready, elbows out wide, hands spread clawlike, eyes burning through the glimmering wash of moonlight. Trigger Gardell smelled the piney mountain air, and wondered if his time had come.

"You like it closer, don't you?" Pelot asked, sneering slightly.

"This suits me."

"You're ready to die then, Gardell?"

"Let's get to it," said Trigger Gardell.

Packy Pelot's right hand jerked suddenly. Gardell's move was smooth, slick, effortless, and his guns came up level and flamed as Pelot's cleared the holster. Packy grunted at the jolt of the .44 slug, fired back even as his knees started bending and breaking down. Trigger Gardell felt the scorching near passage of the bullet as he took the recoil of his Colt, threw down once more, and squeezed off another shot. Dust flew from Pelot's squat form. He turned sideways, swore in dis-

gust, and fell to his knees. The gun dropped from his hand and Pelot spat at it on the ground. A retching groan came from him then, a convulsive shudder shook his wide frame. Packy Pelot lunged out full length on the earth, quivered and was still, looking hunch-backed and grotesque in the moonglow, motionless and dead.

Trigger Gardell was already ducking for cover, dodging back toward the clump of spruces where he had left his rifle, but Red Tattam wasn't shooting at him yet. Red was calling, "Packy! Packy!" and then even more anxiously, *"Packy!"*

"You're all alone, Red," Gardell yelled at him. "You comin' out, or am I comin' in after you?"

A LONG silence followed. In it, Gardell was moving rapidly, circling to the shelter of a sloping escarpment, running along the shadow of the upthrust until he had flanked the bowl in which Tattam was hidden. Then, from a cluster of boulders at the top, Gardell squinted into the basin, picked out the brightness of Tattam's fancy red shirt, adjusted his sights and lined the Spencer.

"Come on in, Trigger," Tattam was finally shouting.

"I got a bead on you, Red!" Gardell called sharply. "Put that rifle down, if you want to live."

Tattam wheeled about, cursing and flinging the rifle from him.

"Why don't you go home, Red? No need of you dyin' up here."

"You mean—you're lettin' me go, Trig?" Tattam was plainly astonished. "Well, I ain't anxious to die, I'll head for home, I'm no damn lone wolf on the trail. I told Packy you'd get us, Trig."

"Start packin' now, Red."

"All right, I'm startin'. I reckon I'll have to lug Packy along." Tattam was in the firelight now, gathering up equipment, rolling his blankets, mumbling to himself: "Ain't no murder charge left against Trigger anyhow. He ain't no murderer, that boy. . . ."

Trigger Gardell walked down the grade toward the depression, the carbine in the crook of his left arm, his right hand brushing the gun butt on his thigh at every step. "You got any grub, Red?"

"Sure, Trigger. You and Nola gettin' hungry, huh?"

"Throw out what you can spare, Red."

Tattam sorted through the supplies, filling a burlap sack for Gardell to take. Tattam inquired: "What you goin' to do with the girl, Trigger?"

"I don't know . . . yet," Gardell said thoughtfully. "I might marry her, and I might kill her."

Red Tattam laughed. "Or she might kill you, Trigger!"

"Yeah, I guess that could happen too. Come on, I'll give you a lift with Packy."

Together they carried the short bulky body into the basin, and stood briefly looking down at it. "Ornery cuss, Packy," said Red Tattam. "Had a lot of guts though, Packy did."

Trigger Gardell nodded in agreement. "He sure was hell on the trail. Or did you get some help, Red—from somebody in our party?"

Tattam shook his red head. "You mean Nola? Well, you'll have to figure that out yourself, Trigger. The girl loves you, don't she?"

"I *thought* she did."

"Well, she ain't been able to see anybody else since you hit that jail in Engelwood," Tattam told him.

"I'll be driftin' along," Trigger Gardell said. "Don't get any ideas about shootin'. I don't wanta have to kill you, Red."

"You won't," promised Red Tattam. "So long, Trig. And good luck."

"That," said Trigger Gardell, "I'll most likely need."

CHAPTER VII

The End of the Trail

BACK AT the base of the promontory, Trigger Gardell decided to climb straight up the cliff, feeling too tired for

the long hike around the back way. It wasn't too stiff a climb, steep, but with plenty of hand- and foot-holds clearly discernible in the flooding moonlight. Slinging the carbine and hitching the sack of supplies to the back of his belt, Gardell started mounting the rock face. It was even easier than he had thought, although a fall would be deadly enough, but there was little danger with all those cross ledges, shelfs and crevices. He climbed quickly and surely.

Hands on the rim of the topside, feet on a narrow projection, Gardell paused a moment to get his breath and summon the strength for this final haul. In his weariness, he found he was rather faint and light-headed from lack of nourishment. Lifting himself with care, Gardell was startled to see Nola Husted sitting there close to the edge, her spurred heels near his gripping hands, a revolver on the ground at her right side, waiting for him.

Trigger Gardell went cold all over, chilled inside and out. There was something in the girl's face that he had never seen or expected to see. In that horrible instant he was sure that she had killed Slim Stroh and Choctaw Brush, and was going to kill him. He was quite helpless there before her, unable to let go with his hands and reach for a gun, in a numbing paralysis that prevented any slight movement.

"Did you kill them, Tremont?" she asked, her tone strange and flat.

"I got Packy," he said. "Red's goin' back home."

The irony of the situation, of everything in life, struck him abruptly so that he laughed aloud. Flaring in anger, the girl lifted one spurred bootheel and brought it down viciously on his tight-grasping hands. Pain stabbed through his fingers as the steel gashed them, and the shock almost made him let go and fall backward to certain death on the boulders below. But he had to know something. *He had to hang on until he knew for sure* . . . .

"So you did kill them?" he said.

"They killed Mom and Hoot, didn't they?" Nola Husted said coldly.

"And me?"

"You were to blame, too. You were to blame for everything!"

"Some girl," Gardell murmured, turning his head from side to side in slow wonder. "Well, go ahead, Nola. Cut my hands off, kick me in the teeth—or just shoot me."

"That's what I ought to do."

"Do it then!" he said fiercely. "You can make it look like an accident. You're good at that."

All of a sudden she was crying, sobbing wildly on her hands and knees, bowing her head and pressing her tear-wet face against his bloody knuckles . . . "Your poor hands! I hurt you, Trem, I hurt you!" She was kissing his hands, and then she was leaning over him, pulling with incredible strength on his arms and shoulders, trying to lift him bodily to safety. At last he was up on top, swaying and panting weakly on all fours, and Nola Hustad was clinging to him savagely, yanking off his hat and caressing his tousled damp head, covering his sweaty face with kisses.

"No, no, no!" she kept saying. "I couldn't, I wouldn't! I love you, Trem, I always will love you. Outlaw or not."

"Well, I'll be damned," Trigger Gardell said mildly.

"Take me in your arms," she commanded. "Hold me, Trem, hold me!"

HE UNSLUNG the carbine, untied the bag of provisions, and did as she told him. Time ceased to exist, there was no talking, no sound beyond their sighing and murmuring, while the stars seemed to storm back and forth across the heavens, and the moon poured its shimmering white fire upon the Choctaw Peaks. Finally they fell slightly apart, stretched luxuriously on the cool soft moss, staring up at the sparkling wonder of the night sky.

"Your hands," she said. "I'm so sorry, so ashamed, Tremont."

"It's nothin', Nola," said Trigger Gardell. "But you've got to tell me now. You didn't really kill them? How could you? Not Slim anyway! Coley was all through livin', I guess."

"No, I didn't kill them," Nola Husted

said. "Not really, not deliberately. Maybe I helped them die. I wanted them dead, for killing Mom and Hoot."

"What happened to Slim's horse?"

"Slim tried to kiss me, Trem. I—I struck out with my quirt, harder than I intended, hitting the horse. Oh, Trem, I didn't mean to kill Slim, I liked him a lot. But in a way I did, I was the cause of it."

"That mare never was quirted or spurred in her life," Gardell said. "But you didn't know that, Nola. What about Coley Brush?"

She told him how that had been on the bridge. An accident, and yet she had been at fault, there was some guilt attached to her. "He was goin' to kill us sooner or later, Trem," she said.

"I reckon Coley was dead already, Nola, dyin' with Slim. But let's hope there won't be any more accidents like that."

"There won't be, darling. Oh, there won't be! Not ever again. But what can we do, Tremont? Where can we go?"

He was thoughtful for a moment. "There's a little town in the woods of Oregon, in country that's pretty as a picture. We could get hitched there, Nola, and settle down and shut away the world outside. Peace and decency is what I want now—and you. What do you want, Nola?"

"You," she said shamelessly, laying her dark head on his shoulder. "Just you. And it doesn't matter where so long as we're together."

The Spanish Hackamore

COWPOKES have for a long time broken colts with saddle and bridle, teaching them the whole works at once. Now there is coming into fashion a method of breaking colts to the saddle without the use of the bridle and bit. It is usually referred to as the Spanish Hackamore system.

The theory behind the use of the Bosal, or Spanish Hackamore, is that it is more humane and is a better way to teach a colt to respond to the commands of its rider. The Bosal is used on the colt until he is completely broken and is ready to go to work, at which time he is introduced to the bit.

The Spanish Hackamore system of training horses is good, and is becoming popular in the West, where it is taken as a new method of horse training. But it is not new. It is at least four hundred years, possibly twelve hundred years old.

The Spaniards learned their horsemanship from the Moors, and the Moors valued their fine horses above everything. They were very careful in training them, and their method was based on gentleness.

The Spaniards took their horsemanship so seriously that they were publishing books on horsemanship over three hundred years ago. In 1736 a man named Chevigni wrote a book on the Spanish or JINETA system of riding, a book called "Notes For Persons Of The Court, Sword and Cape," in which he described the Bosal or Spanish Hackamore as follows:

"This remarkable feature consists of a circle embracing the entire muzzle of the animal, sometimes of iron or rawhide, and even of plain rope, which makes pressure on the nose bridge and tends to soften, tame and educate the horse, makes him bend the neck at the proper angle, lets him back or obey the least command, without possibility of hurting its mouth or the seat of the bit when this is finally used."

The use of the Bosal had already been described earlier in a book published in 1611, entitled "Instruccion y Orden de Gobierno," in which it was said that the Bosal had been brought to Spain by the Moors.

So now the cycle is complete; you can buy rawhide bosals again, and train your horse gently, as did the Moors from High Barbary.

—*Allan K. Echols*

Fog Foster had a clumsy habit of tripping over trouble

"The sheriff just wants to talk with your pa"

The Stray String Saga

By BEN FRANK

IT'S NO SECRET that once there was a French gent by the name of Maupassant who told a tale about a gent by the name of Hanchecome, this second gent finding himself a piece of string and thereby runs into more grief than you can shake two sticks at in a month of Fridays. But as luck would have it, Fog Foster had never heard tell of this doleful business resulting from this Hanchecome hombre's

latching onto a bit of stray string.

So when the long-legged cowboy rode his knock-kneed paint under the lone cottonwood, and a dangling length of twine brushed his sunburned nose, he wasn't worried about it. A kind of befuddled looking young man with a weary slump to his shoulders, he wrapped his long fingers about the string and. . . .

All the way, riding down the trail from old man Newton's Triangle, Fog had been paying little mind to nothing except the way he felt, which was unhappy enough to go drown himself. "I," he moaned from time to time as he rode through the blistering summer sunshine, "would of been better off if I'd never saw the Triangle, or Gladys!"

Which was the truth, because up until Fog fell in love with Gladys Newton, the old man's daughter, he had been a happy-go-lucky jasper with scarcely a care in the world.

Now, this Gladys was a tall slim girl with dark wavy hair and brown romantic eyes and more good looks than any one girl had any business having. The first time she flashed poor Fog a smile, he like to had heart failure. The second time she smiled at him, he was a goner.

But now, two years later, he knew the score from A to Z. Gladys would always be nice to him and let him spend his hard-earned wages on her, but she wasn't going to topple off her rocker and marry no thirty-a-month cow nurse like him. And he didn't see how he could ever be anything else but what he was—a big-eared, hard-working nobody getting no place fast.

Sighing like a dying calf, he tugged at the string. Nothing happened, except the string slipped through his fingers.

The reason he was under this tree was because it stood between the Triangle and the little cowtown of Two-tails.

"Ought to be getting them papers on that Hereford bull," old man Newton had said, mopping his red face. "Fog, you hustle to town and see if they're at the post office."

That was the way it went. When it was too hot or too cold for anybody else to go to town, Fog had to go. It was Fog do this, Fog do that until if it hadn't been Gladys' home, Fog would have told the old man long ago to go soak his fat head. Swearing softly, he tightened his hold on the string and pulled again.

This time, the string didn't slip. An object came hurtling down on Fog's head, knocking off his old ten-gallon hat. What he'd pulled, he saw, was the dangling end of a kite string. It was the kite that had about brained him.

PUZZLED, for he couldn't think of anybody within miles who would be flying a kite, he jerked the string loose from the busted kite and began stuffing it into a pocket of his levis. A man never knew when he might need a stray bit of string. He scooped up his hat, set it back over his faded brown hair and rode on toward Two-tails, never dreaming that history might repeat itself. Topping the next hill, he met Rodney Rouzee riding a prancing bay.

A slick-haired, handsome young man, Rod owned the neighboring Triple-X, thanks to his pa who had worked himself to death in order to keep his hot-shot son supplied with spending money. And don't think Rodney hadn't spent it.

"Hello, Foster," he said, looking at Fog like he was a twin brother to an old door mat. "Going someplace, or traveling?"

"Yeah," Fog answered, rolling himself a smoke.

Looking at Rodney, he felt more dispirited than ever. The truth was, Rod also had a strong romantic feeling toward Gladys, and being a big-shot, had the inside track. As usual, the young rancher was dressed up fit for a hog-calling. A fifty dollar Stetson, fancy silk shirt, silver studded belt, corded pants tucked into the tops of badly worn but expensive riding boots.

"What's new at the Triangle? How's my sugar?"

"Nothing's new," Fog said, getting more aggravated by the second. "If your sugar happens to be Gladys, she's—"

"Who else would it be?" Rod said coldly. "By the way, you might tell her I'll be

over to see her tonight."

He raked the bay with his Mexican silver spurs and rode on at a fast clip toward the Turtle Creek crossing.

Fog snorted and cussed some more as he followed his rival in a leisurely manner. The farther he could stay from Rodney Rouzee, the better he liked it. He reached Turtle Creek at the deep end of the big hole and turned to follow the tree-lined bank toward the crossing. Coming around a thick cluster of cedars, he saw a straw-hatted kid dressed in ragged overalls and a faded shirt, sitting on the bank, fishing.

Fog pulled up to watch. The kid didn't even glance around, he was so busy eyeing the bobbing cork.

Suddenly the fish quit fooling around. It swallowed the bait and made a bee-line for a sunken log.

"Watch it, kid!" Fog bellowed.

The kid lost his head. He yanked on the pole for dear life, and the line snapped.

"Too bad, son," Fog said kindly.

The kid stood and faced around.

"Kind of mixed up about that son business, aren't you, cowboy?"

The kid whipped off the old straw hat, and a shower of bright red hair poured over his slim shoulders.

FOG LIKE to fell out of the saddle. This was no kid. She was a girl. Eighteen or twenty, perhaps, with sky-blue eyes shooting sparks, and a handful of golden freckles scattered over her stubby nose.

"If you'd kept your big mouth shut, I wouldn't have broken my line," she said furiously. "But no, you had to yell, scaring me half to death—and I lost cork, line, fish and everything!"

Compared with Gladys Newton, this girl wasn't anything to get excited about. But taken by surprise like this, Fog blushed and stammered like a school boy and allowed he was downright sorry for scaring her half to death.

"If you got a extra hook," he stammered, pulling out the wad of kite string, "maybe—"

Well, it turned out that she had an extra hook or two and some sinkers. Together, they rigged up another line and tied it to the stick pole.

"Thanks," she said, smiling at him like a burst of sunshine.

Then, frowning slightly, she bated the hook in a businesslike manner. Nice figure, he decided; and if she had the mud washed off her cheek and her hair combed. . . .

"Tell you what," she said, tossing the baited hook into the water. "For the line, I'll give you the first thing I catch."

"Fair enough," he said, folding himself up on a flat rock in the shade. "Folks call me Fog Foster."

"I'm Ella Edwards."

"Ella Edwards," he said, liking the sound of the name. "You must belong to the family that's just moved on the old Dooley homestead."

He looked at her more closely. Not very tall, not very pretty. Looked kind of tired and peaked. He guessed maybe she didn't have a very easy time of it. Friendly, though, and a sweet smile when she wasn't riled, and a pleasant twinkle in those wide, blue eyes.

Suddenly she lifted the pole. The cork disappeared, and the line grew taut.

"I've got something!" she said excitedly.

She heaved, and the catch came up with a swoosh and swung back, barely missing Fog's bony head.

"Don't let it get away!" she cried.

"Don't worry, it won't," he said, haw-hawing. "You've just caught an old boot."

That kind of got her goat. "Well, you don't need to laugh about it," she said, her eyes smoldering. "It's yours. I promised you the first thing I caught. Remember?"

Then the more she thought about that, the funnier it seemed.

"Glad it wasn't a fish," she said, chuckling. "I'd sure have hated to part with a fish that large."

She was laughing at him now, thinking she'd really put a good one over on him, hooking this boot.

But Fog could go along with a joke. Not cracking a smile, he thanked her for the boot, took it down to the water and washed the mud and sand out of it.

"Ain't a bad boot," he said solemnly. "Almost new. A trifle small for me. Might fit my one-legged uncle."

"What would an almost new boot be doing in a creek?" she asked.

He studied the boot with renewed interest. Expensive leather, well made. Of course, being water-soaked hadn't helped it any.

"No telling," he answered. "But I'm mighty happy you caught it for me."

"Honest, Fog, what are you going to do with it? You don't have a one-legged uncle, do you?"

Her eyes were twinkling again, he saw. Well, he could go along with a gag, any old day. Carefully tying the boot to his saddle, he mounted and rode on toward the crossing without a backward glance.

As for Ella, she stood there, watching him, smiling a little, wishing he hadn't caught her looking like a scarecrow. Maybe if she'd been dressed up a little, he would have wanted to see her again . . . A girl could dream, couldn't she? The truth was, this good-natured, befuddled looking cowboy kind of appealed to her mothering instinct. Sighing faintly, she returned to her fishing.

ONCE across Turtle Creek, Fog took the short-cut trail to Two-tails. Thinking again about his unhappy romance with Gladys, he forgot Ella and the boot and the kite string. Gladys wanted a husband with money and a future. If he could only figure out some way to get both in a hurry. . . .

Well, he couldn't think of any way. Raising his eyes, he saw that he was approaching old Hard-head Hepply's windmill, which stood out in the middle of nowhere between a couple big wooden water tanks. Right away, he knew something was wrong, for cattle were milling around the tanks and bawling like they hadn't had a drink for a week. Fog headed that way.

Old man Hepply was there at the well, sweating and cussing. Overhead, the big fan spun, but the spout remained dry.

"Well gone dry?" Fog asked.

Hard-head straightened his thin shoulders and scowled. He was naturally a sour old cuss. With the help of a couple Mexican lads, he ran his H Bar ranch as he pleased and asked favors from no one.

"No," he answered shortly. "It's this blasted pump."

"Sounds like the suction washer's worn out," Fog observed.

"That's the way I figured it. But here I am, six miles from no place with no leather!"

That was when Fog remembered the boot. He helped the old man haul up the pump and tear it apart.

Sure enough, the leathers were worn to a frazzle. The boot top did the trick. A half-hour later, water was spouting merrily into the wooden tanks.

For the first time in his life, Fog saw old Hard-head Hepply's seamy face crack into what might be called a smile.

"Son," the old gent said, "looks like you saved me a long hot ride back home. How much I owe you for that boot we cut up?"

"Nothing a-tall," Fog said generously.

Hard-head looked mighty pleased. He would have paid for the boot, but to get it for nothing suited him much better.

"Maybe I can do something for you someday," he said.

They mounted their horses and headed toward Two-tails as friendly as a couple pups.

"You know, son," Hard-head said presently, "I'm glad to have your company on this particular occasion. It happens I'm on my way to the bank. Sold some steers to a gent from Fever Ridge, and he paid in cash. I reckon you heard about Criss-cross Carry getting robbed?"

Fog hadn't heard.

"Well, he did. Now, I wouldn't want that to happen to me."

He patted a bulging hip-pocket. "I brought a gun. But a gent ain't likely to stick up two hombres who are riding together like this."

"How come you didn't bring one of your hands along?"

Hard-head snorted. "I pay them boys to herd cows, not to go gallivantin' to town. Besides they would run from their own shadows."

A MILE later, the trail led into a timber-choked canyon.

"Stick close beside me, son," Hard-head muttered. "Can't think of a better place for a sidewinder to—"

His voice died in his scrawny throat, for a figure dressed in ragged overalls, faded shirt and a white flour sack with slits cut in it for peep-holes had stepped into the trail. He held a long-barreled .44 in a very steady fist.

"Get off them hosses!" he said in a hoarse voice.

Fog and Hard-head dismounted in a hurry.

That unwavering .44 looked as big as a cannon to Fog and had him scared to death. Old Hard-head was scared, too. But he also loved his money. Suddenly he made a desperate lunge at the outlaw, and yelled, "Let's take him, son!"

But before Fog could get into action, the sidewinder had batted the old man one and then centered his smoke pole on Fog.

"Don't move!" he hissed.

Fog even stopped blinking his eyes. As for old Hard-head Hepply, he'd gone down like a sack of shorts and didn't move, either.

The outlaw went through the old man's pockets and helped himself to the cattle money, a thick silver watch and a pistol. Then he made Fog turn his pockets wrong-side out. Three dollars and nine cents, and a jack-knife. Without so much as a thank you, the coyote backed into the timber and vanished.

Fog turned his attention to the old man. Pretty soon Hard-head opened his eyes and began to cuss.

"Never should've took cash money for them cattle," he ranted. "Might of knowed I'd get robbed, or something. Help me to my feet, son—hey, what's the matter with my arm?"

It turned out that when he'd fallen, he'd cracked a bone in his left wrist. He was fit to be tied.

"Lost my money, watch and gun!" he yelled. "Now I'll have to pay that old robber of a sawbones to fix up my arm!"

"You think it was a accident that robber came along?" Fog asked. "Or was it somebody who knew you had the money?"

"Could be either," Hard-head said. "Ouch! Dang this arm! Guess it wasn't no secret I sold them steers to this Fever Ridge buyer, and he always pays cash."

By the time they reached Two-tails, Hard-head Hepply was all in. Fog practically had to carry him into Doc Pillar's office.

SHERIFF SINK SNYDER happened to be on the street and drifted over to see what had happened. He didn't like the idea of having two stick-ups in Piney County in the same month. He chewed his handlebar mustache, spat and cussed.

"Gents," he said, "I'll run the varmint down if it takes all summer." Election was coming up in the fall, and Sink was mighty worried. "Yessiree! I never say die!"

"I don't care if you say die or not," Hard-head said, coming out from under. "What I want is my money back!"

"I figure the same gent robbed you as robbed Criss-cross," the sheriff said. "Leastwise he was dressed the same."

"How soon can I go home?" Hard-head asked.

"Tomorrow, maybe," the sawbones allowed.

Hard-head hit the ceiling. "Why," he yelled, "Jose and Pete can't no more run a ranch than nothin'!" He glanced beseechingly at Fog. "Son, you got to stop and tell them nitwits what to do. Listen close to me."

Fog listened and promised to give the old man's instructions to the two cowhands. After this, he ambled over to the post office, but there wasn't any mail for Newton.

By the time he reached Hard-head's ranch, the afternoon was pretty well along. He found Jose and Pete sitting in the shade, doing nothing but waiting for the boss to come home.

"Whatsamatta, Foggy boy?" Jose asked pleasantly. "You goned having fimmale worries again?"

"Mind your own business," Fog

growled. Briefly he outlined the work Hard-head wanted them to do during the next day or two. They listened, but they didn't look happy about it.

"Ha!" Pete muttered. "Looks like we don't got no time to rest."

"Hard-head don't pay you boys to rest," Fog grinned.

He swung onto the paint and rode away from the H Bar. It was almost dark when he crossed Turtle Creek. Coming to a crest of a long slope, he saw yellow light winking up at him from the valley. The old Dooley homestead.

So much had happened that Fog had plumb forgotten about Ella Edwards. He wondered if she'd caught any fish. He guessed maybe there was one way to find out, so he rode toward the winking light.

The moment he stepped up on the porch, he smelled the frying fish and found himself hungry enough to eat anything. He knocked, and Ella came to the door.

"Why," she said, looking pleased, "it's Fog Foster!"

"Yeah," he gulped, staring bug-eyed at her.

Something had happened to Ella. She'd washed her face. She'd combed her hair and brushed it until it just about blinded him. She had on a snug gingham dress, and her arms and legs were bare and tanned a golden brown. Maybe she wasn't no tall slim beauty like Gladys Newton, but it certainly didn't hurt nobody's eyes to look at her.

"Come in, Fog," she said. "You're just in time for supper."

Fog staggered into the house. Everything was as neat and clean as a new dollar, but he was too befuddled to notice.

HE MET her pa, Jim Edwards, who turned out to be a pleasant old gent, even if he was a poor dirt farmer. He met her kid brother, whom she affectionately called Peanuts.

Peanuts had red hair like his sister and was in the business of constructing a new kite.

"Lost my other kite a few days ago," he explained, grinning.

"I found it," Fog said, and then told about how that piece of kite string had led from one thing to another.

Everybody got a buzz out of his yarn, and they sat down at the table, chuckling and feeling fine. The Edwardses weren't worried about being robbed. They didn't have anything worth stealing.

He soon learned that Ella's ma had been dead for several years and that it was up to Ella to keep the home fires burning and be a mother to her kid brother. That was likely why she'd looked so tired and some older than she really was, Fog decided. All work and no play—he suddenly felt a little angry. It wasn't fair that Ella had so much to worry about.

"Ella's going to get a break," Jim Edwards said as if he'd read Fog's mind. "My sister's coming to help out."

"Honest, I don't mind the work," Ella said. "It's just—well, it'll be nice to have Aunt Martha here."

She knew how to fry fish, Ella did. Fog ate until he was ashamed of himself.

Naturally he couldn't eat and then run. So he hung around, talking with Jim and Ella and Peanuts. The first thing he knew, it was nine o'clock. By the time he got back to the Triangle, it was close to midnight.

Old man Newton was waiting impatiently for him. He pounded his fists together and yelled, "Where'n tarnation you been all day? Where're them papers I sent you for?"

"The papers didn't come, and I've been pretty busy all day," Fog answered meekly. "First, I—"

"Likely fell off his horse, or got lost," a voice said.

Turning, Fog beheld Rodney Rouzee. With him was Gladys, the prettiest thing you ever saw in a fluffy white dress. She fluttered her dark eyelashes charmingly. But not at Fog.

"He looked kind of lost when I saw him this morning," Rod went on, encouraged by the fluttering eye-winkers. "Of course, he always looks kind of lost."

Rubbing it in like that did it. Fog stepped up and knocked Rodney for a loop. Rod shook the haze out of his head.

staggered to his feet and came back, swinging.

But old man Newton wouldn't stand for no rough-house like this on his ranch. He picked up a chair and allowed he'd brain the next hombre who swung a fist.

"As for you," he bellowed, pointing a quivering finger at Fog, "you're fired!"

"Suits me fine!" Fog said. He was boiling over. "Yessiree!"

He put on his hat and stalked out into the darkness. He was so mad he couldn't hardly see straight. He went stamping into the bunkhouse and made a saddle roll of his few possessions. He buckled on his sixgun. He flung the roll on one bony shoulder and strode back to where he'd left his paint.

By then, old Newton had cooled off some. He didn't know who would do the dirty work around the ranch if Fog left. He was waiting beside the paint when Fog stepped up.

"Now, son, let's don't get all excited," he began.

Fog glanced toward the house and saw Rodney and Gladys holding hands in the doorway. Sighing dismally, he shook his head and began to tie the roll behind the saddle. Knowing the uselessness of arguing, the old man paid Fog off and let him go.

THE RANNIE spent the remainder of the night with Jose and Pete on the H Bar. After breakfast, he struck out for Two-tails. He didn't have any idea where he could land another cow nursing job. Yesterday, he'd thought, life had seemed pretty dismal. But today made yesterday seem like a bed of roses.

He hadn't gone a mile before he met Sheriff Sink Snyder. Sink wasn't happy either. He pulled up and scowled darkly.

"Things is in a mess," he muttered. "With both old Criss-cross Carry and Hard-head Hepply on my tail, my life ain't my own."

"Where you going?" Fog asked.

"Over to the Dooley homestead." Sink gave his mustache an angry bite. "I found a unanimous note stuck under my door this mornin'. It says why don't I go look them new settlers over and maybe I'd learn somethin'. It says—dang it all, I don't like unanimous notes, Fog, but with election comin' up, a man can't afford to set around and miss no bets!"

Fog didn't like it either. He said the Edwards tribe seemed like nice folks to him. He figured somebody just wanted to cause them trouble. "A lot of cattlemen don't like farmers," he said.

But Sink allowed he was going to have a session with them anyway, even if he was willing to agree that the whole thing seemed kind of fishy.

"Care if I go with you?" Fog asked.

Sink was right glad to have his company.

Riding back toward Turtle Creek, Fog wasn't quite sure why he'd taken a notion to go with the sheriff. Likely because he didn't have anything better to do, he told himself.

Ella was alone in the old house. She had her sleeves rolled up and a rag tied around her bright hair. Seeing Fog, she smiled. Then noting the star on Sink's shirt-front, she lost her smile.

"Nothing to worry about, Ella," Fog said. "The sheriff just wants to look around a little and talk to your pa."

"Look around all you want to," she said smilingly. But she was a little worried. "Pa will be back before dinner time."

Fog and Sink wandered out toward the old barn.

"I don't know what to look for," Sink said, "but maybe I ought to look, anyway."

He peered into the mangers and the bins. Chewing his mustache, he kicked through a pile of loose hay. Cussing softly at the dust, he climbed the ladder that led into the mow.

"Fog," he called, his voice tense, "come up here!"

Fog shinnied up the ladder. The sheriff had stumbled over a bushel basket. In the basket, he'd found an old pair of overalls, a flour sack with eye slits in it, Hard-head's pistol and watch and Fog's jackknife. Before Fog could get over his surprise, Jim Edwards came climbing up into the haymow.

"Ella said you wanted—" His voice

choked off, and his eyes bugged at sight of the things in the basket.

"Kind of a poor place to hid this stuff," Sink said.

JIM claimed he didn't have any idea how the stuff could have gotten into his barn. Sink just half-listened. He kept kicking around through the hay as if he expected to find something else.

"Looking for the loot?" Fog asked.

"Maybe," Sink answered.

"I didn't rob nobody," Jim said, looking kind of scared.

Sink gave up the search. "What was you doin' yesterday afternoon, Mr. Edwards?" he asked grimly.

It turned out that Jim had been working alone all afternoon. But he couldn't prove it, one way or another.

"I guess I better take you back to town with me," Sink said, "even if things do seem kind of fishy. Funny thing them boots wasn't with the rest of this stuff."

"Boots!" Fog said, trying to get hold of an idea. "What boots?"

"This gent was wearing a almost new pair of boots when he robbed old Criss-cross Carry," Sink explained. Criss-cross says he'd know them boots for he saw the sidewinder snag his right toe against a sharp rock and skin off a hunk of leather."

Ella had come out to see what they were doing to her pa. Face white, she stood there, listening.

"Guess I better have a look through the house," Sink said.

"You won't find the boots in the house," Fog said suddenly. "Yesterday, old Hard-head and me cut one of 'em up to make washers for his pump. The other one, the right one, is someplace in Turtle Creek."

"That's right!" Ella said.

Sink snorted and chewed his mustache and wondered if everybody had gone loco. Fog told him about Ella's fishing out the left boot. Sink spat out his mustache and said what in thunder would boots be doing in Turtle Creek.

"This robber must've known that Criss-cross saw him scuff a toe," Fog said. "So he threw the boots in the creek."

Sink was fit to be tied. He allowed that Fog was merely trying to confuse him. "I don't go for unanimous notes," he said, "but when I got me a suspect, I don't like nobody to—"

Fog was studying Jim Edwards' old shoes. "Jim's feet are big," he said. "Now, if we could find that scuffed boot and it was too small—"

Sink took another chaw at his mustache. He allowed it would take a week to find that second boot.

"There're five of us, counting Peanuts," Ella said. "We can take rakes and pitchforks."

"The second boot wouldn't likely be far from where Ella snagged the other one," Fog said.

So they went to Turtle Creek and found the boot with the scuffed toe. Jim couldn't get his foot in it to save his soul.

"Anyway," he said, "you can see marks where a spur has rubbed the heel. I never owned a pair of spurs in my life."

Likely if there hadn't been a lady present, Sink Snyder would have cussed a blue streak. As it was, he sat down on a rock and looked at the boot like he hated it. "Election just around the corner, and me without no suspect," he muttered.

By and by, the sheriff rode back to Two-tails, taking the boot and the other stuff with him.

Fog stayed for a late dinner with the Edwardses. Ella felt mighty bad to learn that he was out of a job; and Jim said if he wanted to turn farmer, he could stay on with them awhile. But Fog declined, for being a rancher and cowboy at heart, he didn't take kindly to hoeing weeds and such. Presently, the long-legged rannie said adios and headed once again for Two-tails.

YOU NEVER saw a more down-in-the-mouth young man than Fog Foster. No girl, no job, no future, no nothing. And all on account of latching onto a piece of stray string, he figured.

Sighing miserably, he lifted his weary and hopeless eyes. Coming toward him on the prancing bay was Rodney Rouzee,

looking as pretty as a store window.

Seeing Fog, Rod pulled his bay to a stop. He rubbed the bruise on his cheek and scowled.

Fog looked back at him with distaste. The fancy hat, the silk shirt, corded pants tucked into the tops of a pair of shiny new riding boots, the silver spurs. Fog had half a mind to finish the job he started, but something stopped him.

At first, he couldn't figure it out. Then it hit him hard. Yesterday, Rod had been wearing a pair of old scuffed boots.

"Nice looking boots," he said, trying to sound envious.

"Just bought 'em in Two-tails," Rod admitted willingly.

"Suppose they'll last as long as the ones you threw in Turtle Creek?"

"You crazy?" Rod said. "I never threw no boots in—"

"Things kind of add up," Fog said. "Spending all the money your pa left you, and then going after more with a gun. Afraid to wear them boots after you'd scuffed the toe. Filled 'em with sand and dropped 'em in the big hole. Then wore an old pair of boots a few days . . . Didn't want to buy a new pair too soon."

"Haw, haw!" Rod laughed hoarsely. "Come to think of it, the old Dooley homestead takes a corner out of your range, don't it? Nice to have the Edwardsses leave so's you could use the water, wouldn't it? Also, if Jim Edwards was suspected of the stick-ups, folks wouldn't suspect you. Kinda overplayed your hand, sticking that note under the sheriff's door and hiding that stuff in Jim's barn."

"I've had about enough of this fool talk!" Rod said coldly.

"But even at that, it might have made it tough on Jim if he could have got his foot in that boot."

"I got no time to talk to a crazy man," Rod said.

"But you got time to go to town and try on that boot with the scuffed toe," Fog said pleasantly. "If it fits—"

"It won't prove a thing!" Rod said.

"But if it fits," Rod persisted gently, "and one of your fancy spurs fits those worn marks on the heel—"

That did it. Rod made a grab for his gun, but changed his mind when he saw that Fog had beat him to the draw. . . .

WELL, old Hard-head Hepply was mighty pleased over the whole thing. Especially when he got back the money Rod had taken.

"Son," he said to Fog, "when a old cuss like me can't fall down without crackin' a wrist, it's time he was turning his ranch over to a younger man. Figure you could boss Jose and Pete around? Since I ain't got no near relatives, maybe we could work us out a deal, huh?"

"Yes, sir!" Fog said. "Yessiree!"

Without another word, he leaped aboard his paint and struck out lickety-split for the Triangle. He now had what Gladys expected a husband to have: a good job and a future. Man alive, was Fog feeling fine! He was sitting on top of the world.

He splashed across Turtle Creek and headed upstream. And there, sitting on the bank, was a straw-hatted kid dressed in ragged overalls and a faded shirt, holding a fishing pole.

Just then, a fish grabbed the hook and headed for the old sunken log.

"Watch it!" Fog bellowed.

Startled, the kid lifted the pole. But this time the line didn't break. It hauled out a three-inch sunperch and wound itself around Fog's neck.

Ella got to her feet and faced him, her blue eyes blazing.

"You and your big mouth!" she said. "If you—"

Then something happened to her. Maybe because she had him tangled up in her line and knew it. The fire went out of her eyes, leaving them full of promises. She took off the straw hat, and her flaming hair tumbled about her shoulders. She smiled, and her freckled nose crinkled, and she was beautiful. She was so beautiful that Fog couldn't hardly breathe.

Suddenly he knew the wonderful truth. The girl for him was right here, not on the Triangle. The next thing he knew, he had Ella, pole and fish in his arms.

"Beats all," he said huskily, "what a piece of string will do for a man."

RATTLESNAKES

A Fact Story by JEWELL CASEY

There's gold in sidewinders if you know all the angles

RATTLESNAKES—feared by man, beast and fowl—once hunted and destroyed where encountered, now are hunted, captured alive and sold to several different markets at prices ranging from three to nine dollars each. The same snakes, when properly processed and *all* parts are retailed separately, sell for approximately one hundred dollars each!

Markets for live rattlesnakes include zoos, carnivals, and specialty shows, and reptile gardens are always in the market for "fresh stock" to replace the ones that die. When rattlers are kept for exhibition purposes, and constantly handled or teased, it is said that one will seldom live more than three or four weeks. Therefore, many are added to keep the needed number on hand.

Reptile Gardens and Snake Houses use a considerable number of rattlers for purposes other than show—they buy them for their meat! In the past few years it has became quite a fad, and real good advertising, for "rattleburgers" to be served to all visitors one certain day each week.

In Stillwater, Oklahoma, "Rattlesnake Derby" is an annual 4th of July feature. On this occasion one hundred or more rattlers are entered in the race where they run in a large circle of fine wire netting.

Certain Indian tribes in Arizona use live rattlesnakes in their ceremonial Snake Dances, a custom which has not changed in four centuries. After the dances, which may last for several days, the large number of snakes used are returned, unharmed, to the haunts from which they were captured.

Throughout the nation are numerous medical laboratories which are in constant need of snake venom. Sometimes a single

laboratory places an order with a snake hunter for as many as 1000 rattlesnakes at one time.

"Milking" a snake, which is done at the labs, is highly dangerous, and a person must be specially trained for the task. The venom is massaged from the snake's poison sacs by hand, with the thumb on one side and the fore-finger on the other side of the snake's head. Once every ten days is as often as a snake may be milked, and at each session the captive yields from several drops to almost a teaspoonful of venom. After undergoing this process a few times, the snake dies, so here, as for show purposes, there is need of constant replacements.

After the venom is obtained, it is dehydrated into yellow crystals, mixed with distilled water and sent out to meet the demand. During World War II, great quantities of the venom were shipped to widely scattered areas.

SNAKE venom has many medicinal uses, but is used first of all for making serums for treatment of snake bites. It is also used in treating asthma, cancer, epilepsy, cholera, arthritis and as an agent to coagulate blood. It is especially valuable in the dread bleeding disease known as hemophilia. The venom is made into some forms of medicine used as pain-killers, but these are not habit-forming as in the case of opiates.

Annually, in the United States, professional snake hunters realize more than $200,000 for live snakes which they capture and sell to various of these markets.

The money realized from rattlesnakes discussed in the foregoing paragraphs, however, are a mere "drop in the bucket" compared to the multi-million dollar business from rattlesnakes in Florida. There are several reputable firms, in this state, dealing exclusively in rattlesnake products, but last year only *one* rattlesnake canning plant butchered and canned the meat of 5,000 rattlers!

Canned snake meat is growing rapidly in popularity, and whereas at first it was bought by tourists just for novelty and to shock friends "back home," today the meat is eaten and enjoyed by countless thousands. A five-ounce can retails for $2.75.

When an entire snake is used, it brings in a nice sum of cash, as it seen by the following:

One good snake produces at least twenty-four dollars worth of *meat.*

The skin, when tanned, is very beautiful and made into various items such as belts, buttons, purses, billfolds, shoes, hatbands and even bathing suits, will easily bring twenty dollars.

The vertebra after curing, looks similar to exquisitely carved ivory, and is made into charming necklaces, bracelets and other souvenirs, retail for at least thirty dollars.

Headbones, fangs and rattles sell for sums up to two dollars. In many instances a collection of rattles is made into some unusual souvenir, which sells for several dollars.

Anti-venom, compounded from the venom, has a value of four dollars; oil used for medicinal purposes is worth six dollars; oil used in dressing leather will bring twelve dollars and the gall bladder, valued by the Chinese, sells for a dollar.

One can see from the above prices that whereas the hunter realizes about seven dollars for each healthy, uninjured snake, the retailer receives almost one hundred dollars for each one!

Regardless of the prices paid for rattlers and the large numbers killed and captured, there is still a bountiful supply. There are eighteen species of rattlesnakes, not to mention the sub-species, which would bring the count up to forty-five. The largest are the Texas and Florida diamondbacks, which sometimes attain a length of more than eight feet, and weigh up to fifteen pounds.

BEGINNING at the age of four years, once every two years a female rattlesnake may bear a litter of as many as eighteen to twenty—the average is eleven —but there have been instances where as many as seventy were in one litter.

There are rattlesnakes in every state in the Union, but more in some states than in others. The preferred habitat of the rattler is away from people in caves, on rock ledges, old rock fences, deserted dens of badgers, gophers, armadillos, prairie dogs and other animals. However, they are also found on mountains, prairies, swamps, thickly wooded areas, and have even been seen swimming lakes, rivers and the ocean.

There are a number of professional snake hunters in the nation, men who devote all of their time to the hazardous task of capturing poisonous snakes. One reptile hunter in North Carolina, over a period of thirty-five years, has caught more than ten thousand snakes, and has never been bitten. A veteran snake handler in Texas says he has been bitten sixteen times by rattlesnakes during the sixty years he has been hunting them and "bringing 'em in alive."

Equipment used in catching snakes is practically the same with all professional hunters, a stout stick or pipe about eight feet long, stout cord or rawhide string and a gunny stack. When a snake is encountered, the usual method to capture it is by slipping the noose, which is on the end of the stick, over the snake's head. With a quick upward jerk the capture is made, and then deftly the snake is dropped into a cloth sack where it can do no harm.

Unless one is a veteran at catching snakes, the thrashing of the rattler will often break its neck after its head is in the loop. A person has to have considerable experience before being able to bag a large rattler alive. There is also more than a little danger involved—even with an experienced handler—in putting the snake in and taking it out of the bag.

In addition to the professional snake hunters, there are a number of men and women who hunt them for sport. In several sections of Texas, as well as in other states, as spring rolls around each year "Rattlesnake Hunting" becomes a favorite sport, and one day is set aside for the big event. Most hunts average from twenty-five to a hundred snakes; however, many more have been taken on various occasions.

After the hunt, a rattlesnake dinner is served. Large, fat rattlers are selected, their heads are cut off, then the snakes are skinned. The meat is removed from the vertebra, cut in slabs, sprinkled with salt and pepper, rolled in flour and dropped in smoking hot grease where it is fried a golden brown. Snake meat is said to taste like a cross between chicken and fish, and is claimed by many people to be really "good eating."

According to statistics several hundred people are bitten each year by rattlesnakes, and of this number an average of about one hundred and seventy-five die. The number of deaths was much greater before the usage of anti-venom. Some people have a strong resistance to snake poison, and can throw off the effects of a bite easily, while to many others a bite is exceedingly painful, if not fatal.

Generally speaking, people are snake bitten because of carelessness. They don't pay attention to where they step, or frequently put their hands into animals' dens seeking an animal, or in the case of snake handlers, they become careless and are bitten. There is no such thing as making a pet of a rattlesnake or of "taming" one.

Others are bitten because they do not have proper knowledge concerning snakes. For example, the average person is not able to recognize a poisonous snake from a harmless one. Few people realize with what rapidity a snake can strike—according to tests, one-eighth of a second is the average striking time for an ordinary rattler.

Popular, but erroneous beliefs mislead people. It is generally believed that a rattlesnake cannot strike unless coiled, and that it *always* rattles before striking—usually this is true, but not always, so no one should ever depend on the rattler to warn before striking.

Extracting the fangs of a poisonous reptile does not render it harmless permanently, because the fangs are replaced several times yearly.

The size of a snake does not necessarily determine the amount of poison it has, because it may have only recently used some of its supply. Baby rattlers are born with venom, although the supply isn't great.

Leather boots, while helpful, are not positive protection against the strike of a rattlesnake. Normally, rattlers do not strike unless frightened or injured, but occasionally they strike without any provocation. On level ground a rattler rarely strikes over two thirds of its length, but it can spring three times farther downhill than uphill.

Rattlesnakes, like other reptiles, hibernate during cold weather, but frequently come out if there are several successive warm days.

When out in the country—on hikes or picnics—always keep a sharp look out for snakes, and learn to identify the harmful ones—avoid all of them until you can tell one from another.

Capturing live rattlesnakes may seem like sport and "easy money"—but the bites of these reptiles are just as dangerous now as they were in the days before their monetary worth was known!

The man who was the first to make big money in canning rattlesnake meat died of a bite from a rattlesnake!

Profitable Failure

IT WAS Kipling who said you were a man if you could see the things you gave your life to broken, and stoop and build them up with worn-out tools. That is just what was done once on the famous King ranch. The owner, Mr. Kleberg, had spent the greater part of his life and unlimited money building up two of the finest registered herds of cattle anywhere in the United States; pureblood Herefords and Durhams, now called Shorthorns.

But there was something wrong somewhere. After the Civil war, a couple of men down in South Texas got hold of a few strange animals with humps on their backs, which turned out to be Brahmas, the sacred cow of India. The first of these had been imported to cross with ordinary cattle in order to get larger oxen to be used for draft animals. Nobody thought of eating one of them. But a young Texas Ranger discovered that the animals crossed between Brahmas and local cattle were bigger than the local stock, withstood drought and disease better, and were better eating.

This Ranger later started a herd of crossbreeds, and there were now a few of them along the Gulf Coast of Texas, most of them owned by the late Al McFaddin.

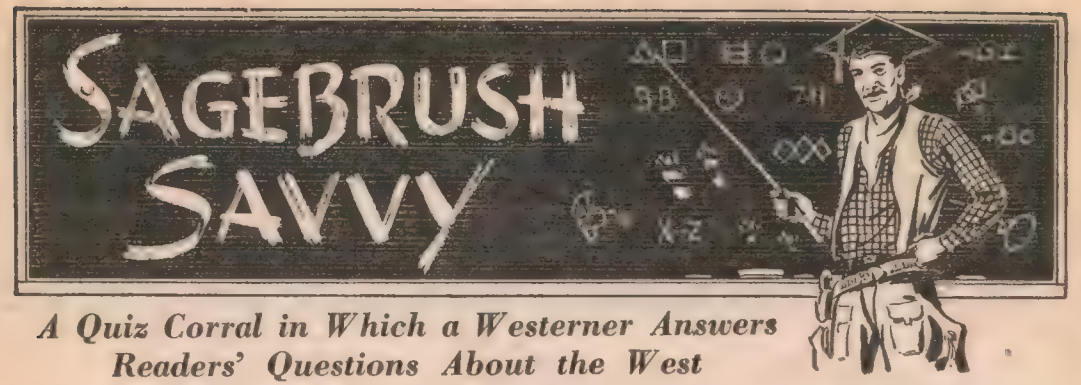
One day while McFaddin was visiting Kleberg, the latter complained that his life had been a failure. He said he had spent a lifetime breeding up the finest cattle in Texas, and complained that McFaddin had come along and crossed some old brindle Brahmas of unknown antecedents with a lot of scrub range cows and had produced calves that outweighed his gold-plated beef by as much as a hundred pounds per head. Kleberg was pretty sick about it.

McFaddin gave him some advice that might have been considered insulting by a less level-headed man than Kleberg. He told the King Ranch boss that if he wanted to make a more profitable cow, he should throw a bunch of those old brindle Brahma bulls in with his blue-blooded Herefords and Durhams.

Kleberg bought Brahma bulls and started his breeding program all over again. The result was the now-famous Santa Gertrudis cow, three-eighths Brahma and five-eighths Shorthorn, which will outweigh any purebred beef cow at any age, has the Brahma's resistance to drought and disease, and brings a premium for fine beef quality.

McFaddin's idea spread all through Texas, until today, there are ranches which raise nothing but registered Brahmas, whose sole purpose is for crossbreeding with the smaller purebred Herefords, Shorthorns and Angus, to the profit of all concerned, thanks to Kleberg's lifetime failure.

—*William Carter*



A Quiz Corral in Which a Westerner Answers Readers' Questions About the West

Q.—Do the Texas Rangers patrol the Border between Texas and Mexico?—M.E. (Utah)

A.—No, this is the duty of another tough outfit, the U. S. Border Patrol, with whom Texas Rangers cooperate, of course, when necessary.

Q.—Are Charros Mexican cowboys?—Josie (Ore.)

A.—In a way, yes. By long cherished custom and tradition in Mexico, the sons of all well-to-do *haciendados* (owners of haciendas) or *rancheros* must learn early to be expert horsemen and to wear with grace the tight-legged, seam-embroidered riding pants, short, silver-trimmed jackets, huge *sombreros* and bright *serapes* of the Charro costume. Because of this colorful outfit, these aristocrats of the saddle got the name "*charros*," which is Spanish for "gaudy." Today the Charros also include riding clubs of doctors, lawyers, business men, etc., in Mexico City and elsewhere, who wear traditional Charro costume, engage in Sunday and holiday rodeos, and maintain a high degree of skill in riding, roping, bull-tailing and all *vaquero* horsemanship, mainly for the sport and fun of it. I recently saw a Charro rodeo in Mexico City. It was a colorful, picturesque and thoroughly he-horseman performance.

Q.—Who were the Earp brothers?—B.F.G. (Ill.)

A.—Wyatt, Virgil, Morgan and James Earp were noted gunfighters of early day Tombstone, Ariz., where Wyatt served as a deputy U.S. marshal. Opinions of old-timers seems to differ as to whether they were heroes or knaves!

Q.—Who discovered the now famous Carlsbad Caverns in southern New Mexico?—R.W. (Tex.)

A.—A cowpuncher named Jim White.

Q.—Where could I go to hunt the wild pigs called *javelinas*?—Doc (Mich.)

A.—Southwestern Texas, southern Arizona and Mexico.

Q.—I know that no hunting is allowed in Yellowstone Park, but what about fishing?—W.W.L. (Ga.)

A.—I understand fishing is permitted under certain restrictions.

Q.—In rodeos I notice sometimes a calf roper takes a second try at a calf he has missed with his first loop and sometimes he doesn't. Can you explain this?—O.L.M. (Mass.)

A.—In most rodeos each calf roper is allowed a second loop if he wants it. Whether he takes this second try or not may depend on several things. Usually the calf roping purse is split into day money, which pays off first, second, third and fourth for the fastest ties on single calves in that day's contest, and into final or average money, which pays off for the lowest total time on three, four or as many calves as there are days or "go-rounds" in the rodeo. Thus if a roper has aready missed an earlier calf or made such slow time that he has no chance for the average money, and also knows other ropers already have him beaten for day money in that particular go-round, he will, of course, pass up the second try. In short, whenever a roper doesn't try his second loop, it is because he already knows it can't win him any prize money. Keep track of the timing in the next roping you watch, and you'll see how it works out.

—*S. Omar Barker*

SMOKE OF CRAZY THUNDER

A Novelet by LAURAN PAINE

THREE clear-eyed riders rode high in the Northwestern back country, leaving Taos far behind them, in the Spring of the year when the sun was still too young to be warm and the air held the breath of winter along the naked, grassy ridges.

Caleb Doorn, discharged dragoon from Santa Fe, lean, tawny muscled and grey eyed. Artemus Bangs, dark visaged, good natured and possessed of remarkably good vision. Moses Lyons, under medium height, heavily muscled, slightly truculent and as hard as old tiswin—reputed to be the possessor of seventeen scalps. They rode together with their three pack horses, "mountain men" in every sense, from the grease-stained and fringed buckskin clothing to the heavy and efficient Kiowa-Apache scalping knives at their waists.

Doorn and Bangs and Lyons revered the land they traveled over. They talked at night beneath the brittle white stars and the cobalt heavens. Doorn listened for the most part, while the older men reminisced. The veterans of the trail had a lore of rich experience that would never grow old.

Lyons nodded his head over the rich venison shoulder and smacked his lips appreciatively. "Now Caleb, we're in the land of the Arapaho. They don't like strangers and who's to blame 'em? Were I native to this land I'd not want others horning in either!"

Bangs wiped his blunt fingers along the fringe of his trousers and grunted dourly. "We ain't strangers here, Caleb. That old squaw-man's just tryin' to im-

When he regained consciousness he found a strange gathering of painted Indians watching over him

Caleb Doorn fought the Arapaho at every turn, but there was one among them he couldn't fight—a lithe and lovely and gently rounded one

press you 'cause you're new on the trail, but it will serve us well to keep our eyes open, even though we're friends to the Arapahos." He nodded sagely. "All Injuns ain't our friends, and sometimes even our friends take sudden changes."

Doorn was using an upturned iron skillet, black and greasy, as a plate. Employing his heavy scalping knife and a sharpened twig which doubled as a fork, he dextrously manipulated the meat. "Before we left Taos I heard an old timer named Levengood say that an Arapaho called Crazy Thunder was objecting to the number of whites coming into his country."

Bangs made a deprecating motion with his arm. "That old bull spreads more rumors than there are stars above us."

Moses Lyons looked up and wiped his chin. "Artemus, you know damned well you heard the same story last Fall when we came out to winter."

Bangs nodded emphatically, unable to speak right away because of a large gorge of meat. "Certainly, but it didn't mean ary a thing, then or now."

Lyons wagged his head slowly and pointed an accusing finger at Bangs. "Caleb, you see before you a man whose scalp will one day dangle from the war bridle of an Injun."

Bangs shrugged. "Yours won't be far away, you grey headed old badger."

Again Lyons wagged his head. "Let this be a lesson to you Caleb. Whenever a man who rides Injun country gets careless and deef to rumors, he ain't far from being a trophy for some enterprising warrior with an empty coup stick."

BEFORE rolling up in their skins the three men scouted the neighborhood, checked the horses and piled some rocks on their fire. With what looked like abandon, the two trail wise Mountain Men threshed around briefly, grunted at one another, and were soon asleep in their roll of skins. Caleb Doorn, not yet accustomed to his surroundings, lay awake with his arms under his head, looking at the mysterious purple infinity above with its panoply of secrets that lay like a velvet benediction over the endless Universe.

Doorn surmised later that he had been lying relaxed and awake for about an hour when he saw two wispy shadows stalking the camp from a clump of aspen six or eight hundred feet away. Tensing in his skins Doorn stealthily lowered his arms. With one he sought his dragoon pistol beside his pallet and with the other he scooped up a handful of dried leaves and pebbles and tossed them quickly at the two sleeping men beside him. Wide awake and with probing eyes Doorn squinted into the darkness, watching for a reappearance of the nocturnal strangers.

For about half an hour nothing happened and Doorn lay quietly without moving, the heavy pistol cocked and ready. Suddenly he heard a stealthy footstep behind and above him. Throwing caution to the wind and with the speed of a leaping panther, Doorn leaped from his sleeping skins and half turned to face the menace, but too late, for the children of the forest were upon the camp.

Caleb Doorn felt the searing pain as something heavy bounced off his skull and thudded into his shoulder. He collapsed in a heap, his heavy revolver going off in a blinding, sulphurous crash that echoed and re-echoed over the ghostly ridges.

Moses Lyons and Artemus Bangs were more fortunate. Caleb's handful of pebbles has awakened both men who, from force of habit, were light sleepers. Guns in hand, with their knives glinting sullenly in the dark light, they stood back to back facing the shadowy foe that surrounded them. There were seven Indians crouched out of arm's reach. Bangs and Lyons, hair askew and puffy eyed from sleep but nevertheless wide awake and deadly, faced the silent savages.

One of the Indians, a tall, lithe young buck with a porcupine roach standing straight up on his head, straightened out of his crouch, sheathed his knife and studied the buckskin clad men before him. "You come with us."

Lyons felt Bangs' shoulder muscles re-

lax a trifle as the Arapaho spoke in English. "Why?"

The Indian jutted his chin Westward. "We go Crazy Thunder. He talk."

Bangs was silent for a long moment. "What d'you say Moses? I don't think he's being coyote or else he'd finish us right here."

Lyons studied the Indians closely. They were a war party all right. The paint and feathers and weapons told that. But maybe they'd been told to bring in whites alive. "If we stand 'em here we'll get it in the end but if'n we go along we may stand a chance of coming through at that." The tall Indian nodded as Artemus Bangs sheathed his knife, although his pistol remained in his fist.

Bangs' narrowed eye glared sourly at the Indian. "We'll come, Injun, but we don't trust you over much."

The Indian shrugged. "You come. We no fight."

WHEN Caleb Doorn regained consciousness he found a strange gathering of painted, stalwart Indians watching over him as Moses Lyons bathed a sizeable lump on his head with cold creek water and Artemus Bangs stood nearby. He saw that his companions had been deprived of their pistols but still had their knives. Doorn was pleasantly surprised to notice that the Indians were more interested in the bump on his head than in the hair that grew over it. Once on his feet he listened as Moses told him that they were prisoners and were being taken to the village of Crazy Thunder.

Two days of steady riding and the Arapaho party with their prisoners topped a high ridge that overlooked a wide, grassy valley studded with majestic pines and cedars. Below them was a picturesque sight never to be forgotten. Many teepees with spirals of thin grey smoke coming out of their smoke holes were set up at random. There was a long, low lodge of some kind in the center of the teepees and many horses cropped the succulent grass that grew in profusion on the valley floor.

Arapahos walked, sat, talked or worked at weapons, hides and horse equipment all through the camp. Moses turned to Caleb. "This is a permanent village. There are many renowned Arapahos here."

Artemus nodded as he appraised the large gathering below. "You might call this the 'capitol' of the Arapaho nation. This is the home of Crazy Thunder, chieftain and war leader of the Arapaho."

The tall buck with the porcupine roach pointed downward with his coup stick and shook the grass rein of his mount. The horse picked carefully among the rocks and fallen trees as he started down a well worn trail. They had been seen by many watching sentinels and runners converged on the gaudy teepee of Crazy Thunder, unbeknowst, of course, to the white prisoners of the war party.

Riding through the village was an experience in itself. Arapaho men, women and children stood up silently and watched the white men go by. They showed, for the most part, no emotion whatsoever and the prisoners could hardly be blamed for feeling somewhat uneasy. There was nothing in the faces that stared at them to indicate friendship or good faith. Caleb Doorn rode as straight in the saddle as his companions but that he was new to the wilderness was obvious to the Indians for, while Bangs and Lyons both wore their beaded knife sheaths with a small, circular twig from which dangled a remnant of scalp with black hair hanging from it, Doorn's sheath was without this badge of the fighting frontiersman.

Caleb studied the array of Indians and was surprised to notice that the Arapaho were tall, clean limbed, well groomed and apparently a very clean people. They were not savage in any sense of the word, but to the hide-bound, ignorant and biased strata of whites that originally came in contact with them, they were termed 'savages.'

The buck with the porcupine roach stopped the war party before a brilliantly decorated teepee. Two women came up and held his horse while he went inside. The Arapahos watched with interest when Crazy Thunder emerged from his teepee

with the tall warrior. For a full minute there was complete silence while the men appraised each other. Caleb Doorn was impressed with the famous Arapaho. Crazy Thunder was of medium height, muscular and straight with deep set eyes, thin nose and sensitive mouth above a stubborn, unyielding chin and jaw. His trousers were smoked, tanned and fringed while his moccasins were beaded a turquoise blue and his long shirt was adorned only by two beaded symbols that looked like bear tracks. The Arapaho leader said something in his guttural tongue and the tall warrior motioned the white men to dismount and enter the teepee.

INSIDE, Crazy Thunder motioned the whites to be seated, which they did, then there was silence for at least ten minutes until the tall warrior returned from his chore of caring for the horses. He leaned his notched coup stick against one wall of the teepee and sat down cross-legged. Doorn was mildly surprised at the even heated temperature of the teepee. He had always imagined that an Indian teepee was a crude and primitive shelter. When the white men had entered an Arapaho woman, supposedly Crazy Thunder's 'Sits-Beside-Me-Woman,' had scurried outside.

The two Indians conversed shortly in their own tongue and finally, looking from one frontiersman to another, Crazy Thunder spoke and the tall buck interpreted. "Crazy Thunder want know who you are. What you do here. Where you go."

Artemus Bangs answered calmly and slowly. "We are men who travel. We love the land of the Arapaho. We hunt and fish and trap. We are like the Arapaho. We love the valleys and the forests."

Crazy Thunder listened impassively to the interpretation. Watching his face, Caleb couldn't tell whether Bangs' speech met with his approval or not. The Arapaho leader spoke at great length and his eyes flashed. The buck turned to the captives. "Crazy Thunder say white men spoil the land, kill the animals and kill the Indians. They are not good for land or Indians. He say Arapaho know of big band of immigrants coming to Arapaho land from South with wagons and much horses. He say Arapaho not let immigrants pass. This Arapaho land, no more white can come. Arapaho want left alone. Arapaho fight to stay alone."

Moses Lyons spoke slowly with a sober glance at the war chief. "Tell Crazy Thunder we wish immigrants go other way too, but also tell him that more come. You kill one band, more bands come. Like leaves on tree, they fall in winter, more come in spring."

Crazy Thunder must have known this, because when his warrior interpreted for him, he raised his somber eyes and looked steadily into the unblinking stare of Moses Lyons for a long moment then inclined his head. His next words were slow and even and the warrior arose and motioned Bangs and Lyons to follow him. When Doorn started to arise he motioned him to remain. Moses and Artemus looked uncertainly at Doorn, who grinned slightly. "Go ahead, I'll be along."

When his companions had left, Doorn sat in silence and pensively studied the decorations on the teepee walls. Crazy Thunder called out and an Arapaho woman entered. Caleb recognized her as the woman who had left when he and his companions had entered. Suddenly the woman raised her face to his in a quick, furtive glance and their eyes crossed for a brief second before she quickly dropped her glance. Caleb felt wonder and admiration flood his being. She was beautiful. Her eyes were brown with bluish whites and her lashes were gently upturned. Her nose was petite and finely made and her mouth was full and generous.

With unconscious candor Caleb watched the woman. She was as lithe as a panther and her feet were small in their bead encrusted moccasins. Her hair was jet black and her figure was full bosomed and gently rounded. When the Indian woman left the teepee for a moment at the gutteral command of Crazy Thunder, Caleb saw the fixed, cold look in the Indian's eyes as

he watched the white man. Blushing at having his honest admiration seen by another man, Caleb looked away.

WHEN the Arapaho woman returned she carried two bowls of ogonsah, an Indian cereal made of corn pounded to paste and covered with leaves and cooked. She set one bowl before Crazy Thunder and one bowl before Caleb Doorn. By the time the bowls were emptied the interpreter returned. Crazy Thunder pushed his bowl aside and spoke at great length. The interpreter faced Doorn. "You called what?"

Doorn pronounced each syllable of his name slowly and Crazy Thunder's lips worked in silence as he rolled the name over his tongue. "You have Sits-Beside-You-Woman?" Doorn shook his head negatively. "You not been wilderness before?" Again the head shaking. "Crazy Thunder say you not yet spoiled by white men. You stay Arapaho. You have Crazy Thunder sister for Sits-Beside-You-Woman."

Doorn stared owlishly at the interpreter. "No. I stay by friends."

The tall warrior spoke briefly to his leader and turned back to Doorn. "Friends go free after Arapaho fight immigrants."

Doorn shrugged. "I go friends. We have council." Crazy Thunder agreed and abruptly left the teepee.

Alone with his friends in a heavily guarded teepee the three whites discussed their predicament. "Hell, I don't want a fat squaw; anyway we've got to get out of here and warn those immigrants." Bangs and Lyons laughed at Caleb's dismay. "Listen Caleb, that girl that scuttled out of the teepee when we entered was Crazy Thunder's sister." Caleb's eyes widened with recognition.

"I thought that was his wife. What they call their Sits-Beside-Me-Woman."

Lyons smiled and shook his head. "Grey Cloud the interpreter told us who she was when he brought us here."

Caleb stared straight ahead. "That's different."

Lyons shook his head. "No different, Caleb. White men don't marry Indians. Take 'em with you, sure, but don't get the name of Squaw Man by marrying one."

Caleb felt anger rising within him. "One minute you praise the Arapaho and the next you say their women aren't enough for a white man."

Artemus Bangs filled a stubby pipe from a pouch at his belt. "It's this way Caleb. If a white man marries a squaw, he has to live with the Indians or be sneered at by the whites, and have his wife treated like a dog if he lives among the whites." He puffed furiously on the pipe until a lasting fire was kindled in its blackened bowl. "Many men have had to make that choice. It's not always an easy one, but then damned few things on the frontier are easy."

Moses Lyons frowned impatiently and slashed the air with his arm. "Forget the damned squaw. Grey Cloud says the immigrant train is coming from Taos. That means it is following the same trail we came on, the Wilkes Trail. Lord knows where they're going, but one thing we damned well do know, and that's simply that they won't get there if the Arapahos attack 'em."

The white men discussed the chances of escaping the Arapaho village and decided to try three separate breaks at the same time, after dark. Doorn was to slip out the back of the teepee while Bangs and Lyons were to overpower the guard in front and make a run for it. It sounded simple and except for the Arapahos would have been simple.

IN SOBER silence the buckskin clad frontiersmen ate their bear roast which was brought to them by a large, flat faced Indian woman. They talked calmly as the hours dragged by. Moses Lyons finally arose and stretched his powerful arms over his head. "Well Caleb, if we never meet again, good luck to you boy."

Artemus Bangs ran his calloused fingers through his greying hair and stood up also. "Caleb, you stand the best chance of escape. Don't take ary chances, man. Steal

a horse as soon as you can and never look back."

Bangs knocked out his pipe and peeked out the teepee opening from a prone position. Slowly he pushed himself backwards and arose stealthily. "He's there all right, Moses." He made a wry face. "Big fellow with weapons enough for an army of dragoons."

Moses shrugged. "Caleb, slit the hides and run for it." Doorn unsheathed his knife, looked at his two friends stalking the front of the teepee, turned back and lunged at the backwall of stiff hides. His knife sounded like a cataract of falling stones to his own ears as he slashed and sawed at the tough skins. Out in front he heard a low gurgling sound, then he jumped through the hole he had made and sprinted like a frightened rabbit across the Indian village and toward the pine covered slope on the other side of the valley. He had reached the trees when he heard men shouting behind him. True to instructions he didn't look back, but ran until the hot breath of his pumping lungs and the maddening thunder of his overtaxed heart forced him to hide in a dense thicket of brush. Sucking cold night air into his aching lungs he crouched wide eyed and watched the back trail.

The Arapaho village was in turmoil. Torches flared and shadowy figures no larger than beetles darted here and there. Doorn watched with a sort of detached fascination from his lair. After the burning sensation had left his chest he took one last look toward the village and saw two things that held his attention. A group of Indians were lustily yelling and tumbling over one another in a heap. Caleb knew that one of his friends and possibly both, had been recaptured. He also studied a group of four horsemen coming his way at a stiff legged trot. The riders were following a lean Arapaho who trotted in front of them on foot, his keen eyes on the frantic tracks left by Caleb. Even in the dim light the tracks were plain to Indians, for they were deep tracks, the kind left by a man whose feet sunk deep into the earth in his desperate hurry to get away. The unmounted Arapaho was Grey Cloud. Doorn recognized the stiff roach and even as he recognized his danger and crept out of the thicket, he drily wondered to himself if the Indian slept with the stiff bristles on his head.

Dodging among the trees, plunging across creeks of chill snow water, startling deer and bear and the small creatures of the lower world, Caleb doggedly trotted in the general direction he knew they had taken to reach the Arapaho village. Wise enough to realize the need for speed yet too wise to run, Doorn hit a gait that was as near to the Indian jog trot as he knew how, and kept it up mile after mile with surprisingly little exertion.

When the first shafts of light tinted the ridges, Caleb abruptly came out into the open and saw before him at least five miles of grassy plain. He stopped and gauged the distance.

It was too far for him to cross before his pursuers likewise came out of the trees. Quickly he ran back to the fringe of pines, selected a large tree with dense boughs, leaped to the lowest limb and pulled himself up with the agility of a squirrel. Squatting in a cleft of burly limbs he awaited the coming of the Arapaho with tensed muscles.

FOLLOWING a trail that for the first few miles was well marked even in the gloom of the forest, the Arapaho search party made good time. Grey Cloud at times slowed to a crouched walk, but the trail, however dim, never faded from his sight. The four mounted warriors were eager with the instincts of hunters. They tried to hurry the dismounted scout, but he would not increase his pace and eventually they stood on the edge of the clearing where Caleb had *first* seen the plains. In fact the Indians were almost directly below the frontiersman's sentinel pine. With a guttural remark of dismissal, the mounted Arapahos jumped on their horses and fanned out as they rode at breakneck speed across the prairie of tall grass, confident that somewhere before them was their prey.

Grey Cloud leaned against Caleb's tree and reluctantly watched his tribesmen thunder out of sight in the pre-dawn. He was relaxed and pensive. He did not dislike some white men. In fact he had once attended a parochial school for a short time and had known some admirable white men. Perhaps the buckskin clad man they now pursued was a good white man. There were some. They were many, like horses, these whites, and some were superior to horses in some ways.

Caleb watched Grey Cloud from his lair. He recognized him by his roach. The Indian was relaxed and after awhile Caleb began to wonder whether the Arapaho would ever move away from the tree. He knew too that the mounted group would eventually return and he had no time to waste so, with grim resolve, he dropped upon the unwary Indian.

When the plummeting dead weight of the frontiersman hit the Indian the two men fell heavily to the carpet of pine needles. Cabel had the advantage of surprise and purpose while Grey Cloud, his rifle knocked violently out of his hand and the breath jolted out of his lungs with equal force, was taken completely unawares. Before the gasping Indian could recover Doorn drove two murderous fists into his body, one over his left temple, the other solidly against the lean, hard jaw of the fallen warrior. Either of the blows would have been sufficient to induce unconsciousness, and the Arapaho relaxed even as Caleb Doorn got to his feet, grabbed the Indian's rifle and took to his heels along the fringe of the giant pine forest, heading eastward now, hoping as he trotted in the light of a new day, that somewhere ahead he would find a way to cross the treeless plain.

The mounted Arapahos gathered together far out on the prairie. Daylight clearly showed them that their prey had eluded them, but far from being discouraged, they held council and decided to split up and each to pursue the white man in a different direction. After all, the frontiersman's temporary advantage was more than offset by their horses, so, after a brief discussion and agreement on a rendezvous after the chase, they each rode in a different direction. The Arapaho who took out eastwardly was Bear Step, an acknowledged and adamant hater of white men and all things foreign to the Arapaho. He was about Doorn's size and build but a few years older. He was a great warrior and bore many scars.

Bear Step cut Caleb's sign soon after he had found and revived Grey Cloud. The vanquished warrior had lost face by Caleb's victory over him and he also was angry as well as uncomfortable from two large lumps, one on the side of his head, the other on his jaw.

He gave Bear Step his knife and requested that his brother take the white man's scalp as his own, but kill him with the knife of Grey Cloud thus avenging the downed warrior. Bear Step took the knife and leaped on his horse, the lust and hatred of whites as well as the fury of unfettered, primitive passions drumming in his head.

WITH the keen vision of a hawk, Bear Step rode after Caleb Doorn. He was forced to stop and reconnoiter frequently because the frontiersman was being careful now since he had a little more time, and this delay caused the blood of the Indian to run dark in his veins. Bear Step was not a patient man and any delay was enraging to him. His reward came, though, sooner than he expected for, topping a low rolling land swell beyond which the trees became sparsely located on a gentle slope of knee high grass, he saw the tiny figure of a man afoot loping along far ahead of him. Raising his rifle over his head so that the sun glistened on the dark symbols painted on his dusky body, Bear Step roared a war cry that came out of his throat wild and shrill. He wanted the white man to know that he, Bear Step, was on his trail. He wanted no white scalp taken from ambush. He wanted his enemy to hear and see and quail before the courage and fury of the greatest of the Arapaho fighting men.

Caleb's lungs were becoming adjusted

to the jogging gait. For mile after mile he trotted toward a distant land swell he could see. Arriving on the crest he stopped and looked about him. There was no sign of pursuit, but he knew better than to hope the Arapaho had given up. He knelt at a small creek and drank slowly of the cold water, rested for a moment or two and studied the country ahead. The trees were thinning out and he thought it might now be safe to resume his westerly line of travel. Swinging the Arapaho rifle into the crook of his arm, he started across the sloping swell and was a long way from the crest where he had rested when he heard a faint shout behind him. With a chilled and fearful feeling, he ducked behind a tree and looked back, certain that the four mounted bucks were thundering down on him. Seeing only one Indian he looked carefully about for the others. When only Bear Step loped toward him he began to hope that the Arapahos had split up. This belief became a certainty when Bear Step, no more than a thousand feet from him, stopped and sat like a picture on his horse. Caleb could easily have shot the horse from under him, but he wanted that horse worse than he had ever wanted anything, so he stepped out from behind the tree, Grey Cloud's rifle across his arm, and stared eye for eye with the Arapaho.

Bear Step studied his enemy. He felt a grudging admiration for the buckskin clad man before him. He nodded his head thoughtfully. Here was a scalp he must have because it came from the head of a fighting man. Slowly Bear Step dismounted and tied his war horse to a pine limb. He walked to within two-hundred feet of Doorn, his rifle held easily in the crook of his arms. Doorn tensed and watched. Bear Step spoke harshly in his mother tongue. Doorn shook his head and shrugged his shoulders. The Indian nodded shortly and made as if to toss his rifle to the ground. Doorn understood and dropped his captured rifle after which Bear Step followed suit. The Arapaho drew a heavy knife with the speed of a striking snake and the sun glistened coldly from the sharp, deadly steel. Doorn drew his own knife and crouched a little from the knees.

In a setting of primitive splendor the half naked Arapaho, his great muscles rippling in aboriginal strength beneath the dusky, glistening skin of his body, faced the white man. Doorn's shoulder muscles flexed beneath the yoke of his buckskin shirt. His corded leg muscles were straight and like spring steel. This was new to him, but he had fought many times before and felt confident although he did not for an instant underrate the foe before him.

Bear Step took mincing steps forward and Caleb waited, content that the Arapaho should bring the fight to him. The Indian was in his crouch now and Caleb braced himself for the onslaught. Taking two quick steps sideways, Caleb threw Bear Step out of alignment and the Indian had to readjust his stance to face the white man. His teeth visible through the thin lips that lay flat against them, Bear Step crouched again and this time Doorn did not move, but braced and crouched. Several seconds went by and the muddy eyes of the Arapaho glared into the blue eyes of the ex-cavalryman. Like a flurry of flashing copper the Arapaho leaped.

Doorn had known the move was coming and had developed a little strategy on the spur of the moment that he figured might save him from the more experienced blade of the Indian. As Bear Step leaped, Doorn dropped to one knee and with perfect timing threw his entire weight behind a bony, desperate fist. The blow caught the Arapaho, who was in the middle of his leap, flush in the groin. With an agonized and dumbfounded look the Arapaho crumpled in a writhing heap. He tried bravely to get to his feet but the awful pain in his bowels deprived him of the coordination necessary to arise. Doorn, still crouched, watched the herculean efforts of the Indian with wide eyes. Taking full advantage of his fallen foe and with no qualms of conscience, Caleb picked up a broken pine bough and swung it mightily in the air. The limb splintered against

the skull of the Indian and Bear Step, most ferocious of the Arapaho warriors, stiffened and lay still.

OUT of respect for his fallen enemy Caleb stuck the Indian's rifle muzzle down into the soft earth beside its owner, took Bear Step's knife and the knife of Grey Cloud, mounted Bear Step's war horse and loped out across the grassy land toward where the trail from Taos would strike the edge of the Arapaho territory.

Caleb Doorn, dead tired and sore, came upon the immigrants at a large spring. The settlers were Southerners, mostly from Tennessee. He told his story to the heavily bearded wagon boss. The immigrants held council and agreed with their leader, Clement Wold, that they would not turn back. Caleb suggested a different route but no one knew any other way. With a shrug Caleb left the group of immigrants with a warning.

"The Arapaho are not like the whiskey sodden aborigines you people have seen. They are intelligent and fighters as well. They will attack you."

Wold, the dark bearded and large man who was the head of the settlers nodded. "We will have to take the chance, Mr. Doorn; we have no other choice."

For a full day after Caleb had joined the immigrant train the settlers moved slowly, warily, into the land of the Arapaho. They kept out-riders posted in force, not only in front of the wagon train, but in the rear and on both sides as well. In fact, while the Indians might and probably would attack, they would be robbed of the element of surprise which they liked so well in warfare.

In the early hours of the second day of travel two of the forward guards came riding pell mell back toward the wagons. They reported that Indian smoke signals were being sent up from a high, wooded ridge about five miles ahead. Wold called Doorn, who still rode the gaudily decorated war horse of Bear Step.

"Mr. Doorn, you are a frontiersman; what do those smoke signals mean?"

Caleb studied the puffs of grey smoke that rose lazily on the still morning air. "I too am new on the frontier, Mr. Wold, and smoke signals are beyond my knowledge."

Wold looked puzzled. "Well, what do you suppose they might mean?"

Doorn shrugged. "If all the Arapahos were in one place it wouldn't be necessary to signal, would it?" Wold shook his head. "Then all I can figure out is that there are two war parties, and the one up there in the trees either wants the other party to attack or not attack."

Wold nodded slowly. "That makes sense all right. I wonder where they'll attack?"

Doorn smiled gently. "While you're wondering, wonder how long it will be before your train has to go through some narrow canyon or into some small valley surrounded by wooded slopes, then I reckon you'll have the answer to that one."

Wold studied Doorn for several seconds in speculative silence. "That must be it."

Doorn watched Wold as he went up to his mounted companions of the train. "You fellows tell them scouts to be careful and not take us into any canyons or valleys where we can be ambushed."

One of the immigrants, a wisp of a man, old and dried up and weathered, laughed shortly and showed broken, stained teeth. "Jest how in hell do you go through country like this without gettin' in canyons?"

Wold looked ahead at the unbroken range of mountains as far as the eye could see. The old man smiled disdainfully. "Them varmints ain't goin' to attack no train of fifteen wagons. I fought Injuns in Kentucky and Texas and I know 'em. They're a thievin', murderin' bunch of cowards. They ain't goin' to stand up to us. Ambush us sure, they might do that, but they won't fight us man to man."

Caleb was irritated by the little man's confidence. He walked slowly up to Wold. "If you believe this man you're making an awful mistake. These Arapahos aren't the Indians he's talking about. I too know something about Indians."

The immigrant laughed derisively. "Lissen to him Wold, he thinks them Injuns is fighters." Wold and the other immi-

grants stood in silence. "Lissen buckskin man, I was fightin' Injuns when you was a cub." He shook his head sagely. "They ain't no Injun goin' to attack fifteen wagons." Caleb felt hot words form in his throat. He hesitated and with a visible effort forced himself to remain silent. With great contempt he surveyed the cock-sure old man and the other sodbusters, shrugged eloquently and walked away.

DURING the noon bivouac a scout returned from up ahead. He reported to Wold, who hunted up Doorn. "The Indians, Arapahos as you call them, are in plain sight on a knoll about a half a mile ahead of us in open country."

"How many?"

Wold spread his hands palm outward. "About three-hundred."

Caleb nodded. "Then the rest of them are probably behind you. Are the smoke signals still being sent up?" Wold nodded and his beard reminded Caleb of a beaver's tail when his head rose and fell. "Then my guess is that they will attack from both front and rear as soon as you are out in the open."

Wold ordered the wagons driven into a tight circle as soon as they were within rifle range of the Arapahos. This was accomplished while the motionless Indians sat in silence without movement, watching from their vantage point. Caleb had misgivings. The Arapahos were wily fighters and certainly wouldn't sit idly by while their enemies calmly went about preparing for defense. He studied the painted men and horses on the ridge. They were armed and ready for combat and their symbols shone fearfully under the clear warm sun. He turned uneasily to Wold. "There's more to this than we can see, Wold."

The immigrant squinted toward the array of Indians. "Out of rifle range."

Caleb frowned. "It's more than that. There's some reason they haven't attacked." His frown deepened and he kicked abstractedly at the tall, dry grass that lay like a dead carpet beneath his feet. The clearing where the immigrants had made their circle was in a broad expanse of alkali soil that stretched for perhaps a quarter of a mile on all sides. The early spring grass that grew so hopefully under the warm sun had soon shriveled up and died because of the acid content of the soil and now, with all the surrounding country rich and green, here the feed was dead and dry and grey.

Caleb Doorn squatted behind a large oaken water cask and examined his rifle. The gun was ready. Something kept knocking at the forefront of his mind but he couldn't figure it out. It wasn't the prospect of the attack, though, that worried him. Unconsciously he pulled up a stalk of grass from underfoot and stuck it between his teeth. He chewed for a moment, made a wry face and spat out the dry stalk. When he saw it fall to earth the full force of his uneasiness came to him. Jumping to his feet, Caleb studied the nearby area and became acutely conscious of the dry grass on which they had made their wagon circle. He ran to Wold, but even as he ran a great shout full of panic and despair went up from the immigrants. Doorn turned toward the shout and saw, too late, the Arapaho tactic. Indians were walking methodically out of rifle range all around the wagon train at the fringe of the dried grass with burning firebrands, setting fire to the dead blanket that covered the acid earth.

Caleb Doorn fought fire with the tenacity of a she-bear protecting her young even though he was perfectly aware of the hopelessness of the undertaking. Water barrels were drained of their last dregs. Everything was soaked that could be before the water supply was exhausted. Women and children huddled on the floor of the great wagons with wet rags over their faces, white with fear and wet with perspiration from the increasing heat. Caleb's fringed clothing was dark with sweat.

WITHIN the circle of immigrant wagons there was confusion and terror. The horses, smelling smoke which rose

like great billowing clouds of doom, and sensing the near panic of their human associates, ran blindly and furiously among the wagons, their feet throwing up great clods of loamy earth. As the fire swept down upon the wagons the air became stifling for lack of oxygen, and the heat tortured the bodies and the lungs of the luckless immigrants who had no choice but to breathe it.

Crazy Thunder and his band of warriors had not moved from the ridge. They sat immobile and watched the holocaust wrought by their fellow tribesmen who had come up from behind the immigrants.

Caleb knew that the fire was only a prelude to the fury that would follow. He had no illusions about the purpose of the large mounted group of Arapahos on the ridge, bright in their war paint and as deadly as any race of men on earth.

When the fire had all but spent itself, the immigrant wagon circle was a shambles. Wagons smoked and wooden ribs protruded in charred ruin where once the great grey canvas had protected the chattels of the settlers. The ribs looked for all the world like the skeleton remains of giant beasts. Several of the immigrants had died, cruelly burned in the raging flames.

Standing in the circle with Wold, whose great beard had been singed, Caleb Doorn sucked air into his tortured lungs and wiped the grime from his face. "There isn't much left here to defend except the horses and the humans."

Wold nodded and his red rimmed, bloodshot eyes looked at the remains of his caravan with misery in their depths. "We'll have to defend ourselves, even though we cannot leave this spot."

Doorn looked at the Indians. "And now I reckon we'll get our chance." The Arapahos were coming down off the ridge, Crazy Thunder in the lead. The Arapaho leader had held a long council with his oldsters. They had come to a decision and were going to approach as close as they dared to the gutted wagon train. With caution and deliberation they rode along the edge of the burned out grassland. Crazy Thunder held his arm aloft and the party stopped. Caleb turned to Wold in obvious puzzlement. "They aren't going to attack. They must have something else up their sleeve."

The wagon boss shook his head slowly. "Now I know what you meant, when you said these Indians are not like the ones we're used to. Personally I've had enough of their intelligence and am plumb ready to leave their country to them."

Doorn watched intently as a small party of Arapaho detached itself from the larger band and rode forward with arms raised, palms outward and fingers extended. Caleb turned to Wold. "Tell your people under no circumstances to fire a gun." Wold turned and repeated the order to his runners who quickly spread the word.

When the Indians rode closer, Caleb recognized Grey Cloud and a grim smile settled over his face. The tall Indian had two large lumps, one on his head and one on his jaw, that were red and swollen. Caleb turned again to Wold. "That tall Arapaho on the Appaloosa horse is Grey Cloud. He can speak and understand English."

Wold touched Caleb's shoulder lightly. "If they want to palaver, you represent us. You know them."

Caleb shrugged. "What will I tell them?"

Wold looked tired. "Tell them we'll leave their land." Caleb nodded and jumped over a wagon tongue and walked toward the Indians, arm raised and hand open.

AT SIGHT of the white man in stained and grimy buckskin walking toward them, the Arapahos sat motionless and only Grey Cloud rode slowly forward, mixed emotions on his finely chiseled features as he recognized Caleb Doorn. They eyed each other in silence for a long moment, then Caleb spoke. "Grey Cloud, before we talk of immigrants, I give you your knife." The Indian reached out automatically and took the knife. Caleb looked Grey Cloud straight in the eye. "I also give you another knife, it belonged

to a brave warrior." Again Grey Cloud took the knife. He looked hard at the beaded sheath and four scalp locks that hung limply from it.

"You fight Bear Step?" Caleb nodded. Grey Cloud looked again at the knife. "You kill Bear Step?" Again Caleb nodded. Grey Cloud remained silent for a moment and his fingers unconsciously ran over the sheath that held Bear Step's knife. There was honest admiration and frank approval in his eyes. "You keep Bear Step knife. Your coup. You warrior now."

Caleb took back the knife and tucked it into his belt. "Grey Cloud, Crazy Thunder do what to my friends?"

The tall Indian stroked his jaw gingerly and Caleb was hard pressed to stifle a grin. "Crazy Thunder keep 'em. They no make get-away. They wait for you at village." Caleb nodded. Apparently Bangs and Lyons both had been recaptured and were not too badly hurt.

The Arapahos behind Grey Cloud watched in somber silence as their representative and the white man talked. Back at the ravaged immigrant camp the settlers also watched; each one willing to forget the loss of their goods if the Arapahos would allow them to leave alive. The women prayed fervently and the men watched the conversation with rifles in their hands and fear mixed with despairing hope in their hearts.

"What Crazy Thunder do immigrants?"

Grey Cloud let his proud gaze roam slowly over the wreckage of the wagon circle behind Doorn. "Crazy Thunder say immigrants can go back they came. Take all can carry. Crazy Thunder take horses and rifles. Whites keep pistols and knives. Crazy Thunder leave wagons for warning other whites no cross Arapaho land."

Caleb nodded. "You wait; I tell whites."

As Grey Cloud inclined his head, Caleb went back to the immigrants. He found Wold in the group awaiting his return and told him Crazy Thunder's terms. The immigrants were elated. Even the loss of their rifles and horses was better than the alternative of dying, which Caleb carefully pointed out.

Caleb returned to Grey Cloud. "Immigrant say all right. Arapahos send warriors, take horses and rifles."

Grey Cloud turned and motioned his guard forward. The Indians came up, were told to get the horses and the guns, which they rode forward to do, then Grey Cloud turned again to Caleb. "You come Arapaho."

Caleb shook his head. "Crazy Thunder let white friends go?"

Grey Cloud nodded. "You come Arapaho."

Again Caleb shook his head. "I white. No Arapaho. I stay with whites. Better for me, better for Arapaho."

Grey Cloud nodded. "You come Arapaho."

"No. You come Arapaho. Crazy Thunder sister wait you."

Caleb felt heart miss a beat. "Grey Cloud great warrior. Make much war, much medicine, now he make great story."

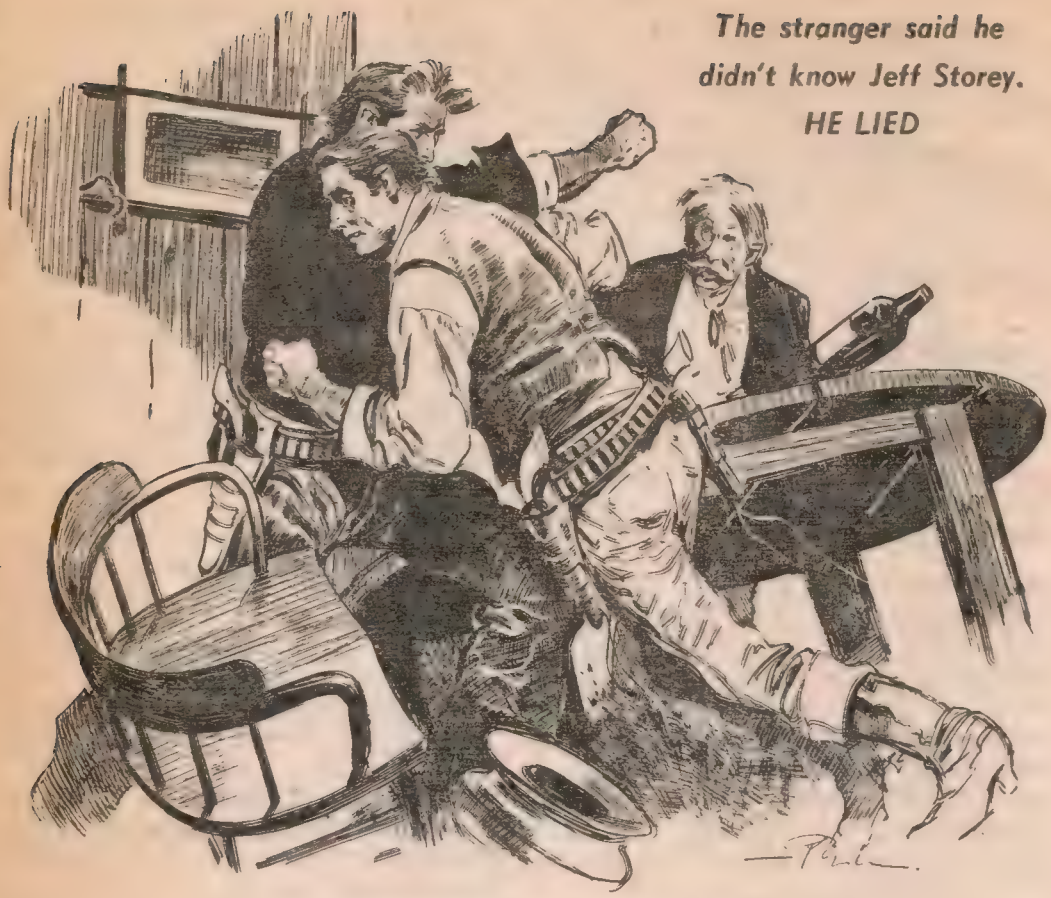
Grey Cloud shook his head vehemently. "No. Damn it. Grey Cloud talk truth. Crazy Thunder sister make Crazy Thunder promise not kill immigrants. Not take scalps; only horses and guns. She ask Grey Cloud tell you she sit beside teepee wait your gifts." Caleb looked a long moment in silence at the tall Arapaho.

During his escape and subsequent fight with Bear Step and eventual juncture with the wagon train, Crazy Thunder's sister had been foremost in his mind. He had built a mental picture around her that the Arapahos would have called his "medicine." Her deep set, shy brown eyes and the long, upturned lashes. That one glance she had dared to cross with his admiring gaze in the teepee of Crazy Thunder. The lithe, supple movements of her strong, firm body, Caleb recalled them all in a rush of emotion. Grey Cloud's even white teeth shone through his lips in a careful smile.

"You come Arapaho?"

The words were soft and the question was a statement. Caleb smiled openly for the first time in many moons. "Yes, I come Arapaho."

The stranger said he didn't know Jeff Storey. HE LIED



He peppered the kid with right and left hooks

Stranger in Spanish Fork

By JAMES HUGHES

HE WASN'T the sort of fellow who stood out in a crowd; average height—average build. If you passed him on the street, you wouldn't have looked twice.

His name? He told us to call him Bill. He didn't tell us his last name until later.

I saw him for the first time when he stepped up to the bar in the Gold Nugget Hotel one morning, and said: "I'm looking for Jeff Storey's ranch."

I was in the middle of a poker game, but I looked up at him. I think it must have been his voice that made me look up. It was a deep, strong voice.

Carl Sanders, who owns the Gold Nugget and was tending bar, gave the stranger a quick once-over and said: "You want Jeff Storey's ranch or Jeff Storey himself?"

"Jeff Storey."

"I saw him on the street a while back,"

Carl said. "Do you know him?"

"No," said the stranger.

"Slim!" Carl called across the room to me. "Take the stranger outside and help him find Jeff Storey. Time you roused yourself a little and did something to earn the drinks you grub off of me."

I paid no heed to Carl's insults; he was always trying to nettle me. Besides, I was ahead almost three dollars in the stud game, so I welcomed the chance to slide out with my winnings, without leaving any hard feelings behind. "This," said Carl to the stranger, "is Chuckawalla Slim, a likeable enough cuss, but plain lazy. He'll help you find Jeff Storey."

The stranger and I shook hands. His grip matched his voice; it was strong. "Call me, Bill," he said.

HE HAD little to say as we drifted down the street, but he looked around in a curious sort of way, as though Spanish Fork held some special interest for him. As if maybe he had been in town a long time before, and was surprised at how the place had changed. I stuck my head in Jim Gatty's blacksmith shop and the Spanish Fork Post Office, but Jeff Storey wasn't in either place, so we just kept on walking.

After awhile Bill asked: "What sort of fellow is Jeff Storey?"

"A fine fellow. He owns the Circle S."

"Big outfit?"

"Biggest around these parts. Jeff Storey's got a lot of money but he doesn't try to impress anybody with it. He's a quiet, serious man, a mite bit older than yourself. He don't drink, gamble or get into fights. All those sins are heaped up in his son, Roger."

I started to tell Bill about Roger Storey, but that didn't seem to interest him. A frown had crept over his face. Interrupting me, he said: "Are you sure Jeff Storey is as rich as you say?"

"Richest man I know," I said. Right then I spotted Jeff Storey. "There he is now! He's coming out of the bank. Most of the money in the place is his."

Bill stopped short. I expected him to call out to Storey, but instead he just stared.

"Coming out of the bank," I murmured to myself, "and I'll bet my poker winnings he's got a thousand dollars in his pocket. One thousand dollars that will be in the hands of a pair of crooked gamblers before sun-up tomorrow." The thought of it made me angry. "If I had a boy like Roger Storey, I'd horsewhip the hide off of him. Well—" and I looked at Bill—"ain't you going up and speak to him?"

He shook his head. "No, I reckon not. I reckon maybe there'd be no point in it," he said. He looked a little sad. His hand gripped my arm and he turned me around. "Maybe you ought to tell me more about young Roger Storey."

I figured there was something a mite loose in his head. But if he wanted to hear about Jeff Storey's no-good son, I was the man who could tell him. I could stretch it out all afternoon and maybe grub a few drinks to boot.

We mosied back to the Gold Nugget, where he bought the drinks and I drank them. He didn't touch a drop.

I told him about all the hot water Roger Storey had got himself into. About the boy's fiery temper and his crazy idea that the only way a fellow could prove he was a he-man was by pouring raw whisky down his throat and by gambling away all his—or rather his pa's money.

"What the kid needs," I said, "is to meet up with somebody who can beat the tar out of him, but there's nobody in this town who can do that. Meanwhile his pa goes along footing the bills while the young whippersnapper runs hog wild. The boy's ma is dead, and the old man just can't seem to handle him. Only the other night Roger got into a poker game with a couple of bad hombres from down around the Border, and he wound up owing them a thousand dollars."

"That's a heap of money," Bill said gravely.

"Yep," I agreed. "That's a heap of money even for Roger Storey. He didn't have the cash handy, but he gave them his I.O.U. and promised to have the

money for them tonight. That's no doubt the reason Jeff Storey was in the bank. He was withdrawing one thousand dollars to hand over to Roger for his latest debts. I'm afraid that boy is going to be the ruin of Jeff Storey."

BILL was silent for some time. He seemed to be mulling over something in his mind. Then he said: "I'd like to have a look at Roger Storey."

"He'll be in here tonight. He knows better than to try to double-cross those two hombres."

"I'd like to see him before tonight," Bill said.

Well, he was paying for my drinks and I sort of liked him, so I called Carl over and asked him if he knew where we might be able to find Roger Storey. Carl suggested we look in Clyde Flemming's livery stable.

"That's where Roger keeps his horse when he's in town," Carl said. "And I'll say one thing for him—he sure takes good care of that old nag."

Bill and I left the Gold Nugget and walked up the street in the direction of Clyde Flemming's livery stable. As we approached it, Bill said to me: "Listen, Slim. If Roger Storey is in the stable, don't you say a word. Maybe I'll talk with him and maybe I won't. But just let me handle this."

Clyde Flemming wasn't around when we entered, but sure enough Roger was in there currying his horse. It wasn't much of an animal. You would think, with so much easy money available to him, that he would have spent freely and bought himself a real hunk of horseflesh, but he had ridden this little forlorn looking critter for as long as I could remember, and he was real fond of it.

"Anything I can do for you?" he said to Bill, ignoring me completely.

"Nope," Bill replied. "I just want to look around a spell. I may want to buy one of these horses."

Roger didn't pay much heed to us. He seemed to have something on his mind. He was a tall, handsome young fellow. Usually he had a smug expression on his face, but right now he was wearing an anxious look and his shoulders slumped a little. I figured it was just a hangover from the previous night's carousing.

Bill and I walked around, looking at Clyde Flemming's horses, and after awhile got back to Roger. Bill patted the kid's horse.

"This horse for sale?" he asked.

"This horse ain't for sale to anyone for any amount of money," said Roger quickly and definitely.

"That's too bad. I'd be willing to pay a fancy price for him."

"Not for sale, mister. This horse and I have been pals for a long time. We like each other."

"Okay," said Bill. He shrugged his shoulders, turned and walked out of the stable. I followed him out. There was a far-away look in his eyes. "So that's Jeff Storey's boy," he said softly. "Seventeen years is sure a long time."

I couldn't figure out what he meant. I wondered just who in blazes he was and why he had come to Spanish Fort looking for Jeff Storey, and why he was now interested in Storey's no-account young one. Then I saw Jeff Storey himself coming towards us.

"Look who's coming this way," I whispered to the stranger.

Jeff Storey didn't see us, or if he did, he wasn't interested. He was heading for the stable, kicking up clouds of dust as he stormed by us. Bill pulled me back against the wall of the stable and said: "Wait!"

We couldn't see inside the stable from where we stood. At first we couldn't hear what was being said.

But in a little while the talk got louder. I could hear the old man shouting: "I don't care who you owe it to! You lost the money, and this time you're going to pay it out of your own pocket!"

"But I haven't got it!" the kid protested.

"You should have thought of that before you sat down at the gaming table!"

"But, Pa, I've got to pay off! I gave

them my I.O.U. It's a debt of honor!"

"Honor!" the old man snorted. "What in Sam Hill does your kind know about honor?"

I GLANCED at the stranger, and there was a strained look on his face as he listened intently to the argument going on inside the stable.

"But they're tough hombres, Pa! They—"

"For all I care, they can break every bone in your worthless body! That's final! I've had enough. I'm through with you. You can look out for yourself from now on!"

With those words the old man stormed out of the barn, muttering between his teeth. He rushed by so close to us, I could have reached out and touched him. But he never even noticed us standing in the shadow of the stable wall. I swear he was letting off sparks.

You could hear something else, too. A strangled sob came from deep down in the man's throat.

"There goes a man with a broken heart," I said bitterly. "And it has to happen to the finest man in these parts. Fate sure plays some rotten tricks!"

Bill nodded his head in agreement. His fingers gripped my arm and I was surprised to feel them tremble. "Let's move along," he said. "Just remember this, Slim: a thing is never all black until you can't see through it."

We went back to the Gold Nugget and about a half hour later Roger Storey walked in. He looked badly shaken. He stepped up to the bar and ordered a shot of whisky.

"Is there anybody around here who could run an errand for me?" he asked Carl.

"Try Slim," Carl answered, pointing in my direction.

The kid came over to the table where Bill and I were sitting. He gave Bill a queer sort of look, as if wondering who he was and what he was hanging around for. "Would you run an errand for me, Slim?" he asked. "I'd like you to deliver a note to my father."

I told him I was all tied up.

"I'll give you five dollars," Roger said.

That was a heap of money just for riding out to the Circle S and back. I looked at Bill, hopefully, but he shook his head. "You stay here," he said. "I'll be needing you."

That made the kid angry. He had come to believe that money talks. Glaring at Bill, he snapped: "And just who are you?"

"I don't think that matters," Bill said. "When I want a man to know who I am, I'll introduce myself."

Ordinarily that kind of words would have been a signal for Roger Storey to start swinging. Usually it didn't take much to make him flare up. But just now he had other things on his mind and was in no mood for scrapping. He muttered something under his breath and walked into the back room where a poker game was going full tilt.

A little while later one of the Circle S cowhands came out of the back room, smiled at Carl and said in passing: "He has to write letters for his money now. I hope his old man turns him down!" There was an envelope poking out of his shirt pocket.

He strode out, and Bill got up from our table. "Wait here for me, Slim," he said. It was like a command. He drifted out the door. The door swung shut after him, and that was the last I saw of him for awhile.

I went up to the bar and told Carl about our visit to the stable and how the stranger tried to buy Roger Storey's old horse. "What do you make of it?" I asked.

Carl frowned and shook his head. "That fellow's sure up to something."

"But what?" I said.

Carl shook his head again and walked down to the end of the bar to serve a cowhand who had just come in.

I had been drinking pretty heavily and was kind of hungry, so I slipped into the kitchen and fixed me up a bite to eat. My stomach full, I lay down and tried to

catch some shuteye. Being sort of unofficial handyman for the Gold Nugget, I got my room and board in return.

It was going on eight o'clock when I woke up. I hurried out front and there was the stranger, back again at our table.

He asked me where I had been and I told him.

THERE were quite a few cowhands in the place; some matching coins at the bar, and others sitting around the tables playing cards. There were several Circle S men in the room, but I didn't see the rider who had gone out to deliver Roger Storey's letter.

I got me a drink and sat down next to Bill. The door to the backroom opened and Roger Storey came out. "Isn't that guy back yet?" he asked angrily. "What in blazes is keeping him?"

The stranger stirred beside me. "Offhand, I'd say your daddy was keeping him, sonny boy," he drawled. "And a good thing, too, if you ask me."

Somebody in the room snickered. The kid turned in our direction. His face was gray with rage. The boys at the bar stopped matching coins and all conversation died out. A few peace-loving waddies ambled towards the door and quietly slipped out. Roger Storey strode over to our table and looked down at the stranger.

"Who's asking you anything," the kid said.

"Nobody's asking, but I'm saying it would do you a lot of good to strum your own guitar for once. From what I hear tell, you been doing all the dancing while your pa strummed."

Carl, behind the bar, dropped a whisky glass, but no one looked in his direction or even batted an eye. All eyes were on Roger Storey and the stranger. Everybody present was stunned. Nobody had ever talked to Roger that way. It just wasn't healthy!

"Stand up, stranger!" the kid snarled.

"You want to be careful, sonny boy," the stranger said softly. "I may be older, and may weigh a sight less, but I've

[*Turn page*]

NERVE POWER
Can Be Acquired . . .
You're no better than your nerves. Send for free book that will show you how to build yourself a strong, vital nervous system without drugs, apparatus or psycho-therapy.

Your nerves are the real source of your health and strength, the foundation of your personality, and in the final analysis of your very character. Your nerves control the functional efficiency of every organ and gland of your body, and are therefore the supreme factor in your health condition.

Build a strong nervous system with the NEURAVIM METHOD, and you will acquire thereby, a radiant personality, dominant, alive, and a glowing health condition. You will become endowed with vigor, vitality, endurance and creative energy that will mean a new driving force in your life. You will not be afraid to attempt and carry through undertakings that are beyond your present nerve capacity.

NEURAVIM is not drug, machine or psychotherapy, but a successful all-embracing 7-point course, that works to build a strong nervous system, to store up reserves of nervous energy, and to set in motion factors that will arrest and reverse the direction of degenerative processes leading to nervous break-downs.

Send today for free book that tells all about NEURAVIM, and how you can apply it immediately to your own case.

THE NEURAVIM COMPANY LTD.
Dept. 16, 8 W. 40th St., New York 18, N. Y.

POKER CHECKS

Famous Hub Checks, Non-Duplicate, Square Edge, Heaviest Game Check, Cut and Stack Accurately. Supplied in any color.

FREE CATALOG Expose: The Open Book, Sealed Book, Scientific Betting, Master Key System, How to Control Fair Dice, Runup System, Plastic Playing Cards for Club Use.

"The Old Reliable"

K. C. CARD Co., 843 S. Wabash, Chicago 5

BE A *Nurse*
MAKE $50-$60 A WEEK

You can learn practical nursing at home in spare time. Course endorsed by physicians. Thousands of graduates. 53rd yr. One graduate has charge of 10-bed hospital. Another saved $400 while learning. Equipment included. Men, women 18 to 60. High school not required. Easy tuition payments. Trial plan. Write today.

CHICAGO SCHOOL OF NURSING
Dept. 4211, 41 East Pearson Street, Chicago 11, Ill.
Please send free booklet, and 16 sample lesson pages.

Name.....
City.....*State*.....*Age*.....

"How to Become a Mail Order Millionaire"

SENT FREE! RUSH NAME ON POSTCARD TODAY

Read the inside facts about hundreds of "little fellows" who are running Mail Order businesses from their homes—many making $20,000 and more **every year!** Learn how small investments ($16.80 in one case!) have mushroomed into profits of thousands. This incredible reprint from *Mechanix Illustrated* will be sent absolutely **free,** along with details showing how you can quickly master the secrets of getting orders and money in your daily mail, *in a business that's all yours.* Rush name today. A postcard will do.

The L. W. SURVEY 7070 North Clark Street, Dept. 1911, Chicago 26, Ill.

RUPTURED?

Get Relief This Proven Way

Why try to worry along with trusses that gouge your flesh—press heavily on hips and spine—enlarge opening—fail to hold rupture? You need the Cluthe. No leg-straps or cutting belts. Automatic adjustable pad holds at real opening—follows every body movement with instant increased support in case of strain. Cannot slip whether at work or play. Light. Waterproof. Can be worn in bath. Send for amazing FREE book, "Advice To Ruptured," and details of liberal truthful 60-day trial offer. Also endorsements from grateful users in your neighborhood. Write: **CLUTHE SONS, Dept. 33, Bloomfield, New Jersey**

STOP

Suffering from symptoms of ASTHMATIC ATTACKS

Get relief from dreaded symptoms of bronchial asthma

with **ASTHMADOR**

...Dr. R. Schiffmann's ASTHMADOR is a quality inhalant formula that helps make breathing easier. Outsells all other treatments of its kind year after year! Ask your druggist for ASTHMADOR in powder, cigarette or pipe mixture form.

HERE'S A PROFITABLE BUSINESS FREE!

MONEY MAKING OPPORTUNITY FOR YOU WITHOUT INVESTMENT!

No experience needed to act as our Local Dealer for MASTER Work Uniform garments. Every business concern a prospect. Advertising embroidered on garments is a big sales feature. Stores can't compete. You can easily earn up to many thousands of dollars yearly. We supply all Sales Equipment FREE. Write

GEO. MASTER GARMENT DIV.
266 WATER STREET, LIGONIER, INDIANA

strummed my own guitar long enough to be pretty good at it."

"Stand up!" cried Roger. Now his voice was out of control and it rose to a shrill squeak.

"If you insist," said the stranger calmly. He started to get up, and Roger threw a punch. By all rights that punch should have torn the stranger's head off his shoulders. I'd seen Roger Storey in action plenty of times before. He was like a mad bull when he got going, and I had never seen him licked. But this time things were a little different. The kid let fly with his Sunday punch but it never landed. The stranger shifted his head a little and the blow went right by him, throwing the kid off balance.

"That's not right, sonny," Bill drawled. "You should give a fellow a chance to stand all the way up before you take a wallop at him."

The kid sailed in again. He threw roundhouse lefts and rights at the stranger but not one of them landed squarely. Some glanced off the stranger's arms and others went around his head.

"See, sonny," Bill said, "your guitar is out of tune. I think I'll play for a spell."

He moved into the kid. The lacing he gave Roger Storey was the sort you rarely see in a rough and tumble cow town like Spanish Fork. It was artistic, if that word can be rightly applied to a fist fight. He backed the kid across the room with straight left jabs.

When he had him up against the wall he peppered him with left and right hooks. From the way the stranger handled himself, it was clear that he had spent some time in the prize ring. Roger had no defense against the blows. The stranger could have finished Roger any time, but didn't. Instead he just toyed with him. And all the time he kept up a running flow of taunts.

"At your age, sonny, you ought to be in good shape—but you ain't. You're soft from loose living. Full of sound and fury, but not much to back it up with. A good fighter never loses his temper. If I had a mind to, I could smash every bone in

your soft hide. But you're not worth the little effort it would take. I save my heavy ammunition for *men!* Why, you're not even dry behind the ears yet. You're a disgrace to the name Storey. See if your easy money can buy you an answer to this!"

HE DROVE a hard right uppercut to the kid's chin and followed it with a left to the pit of the stomach. The kid's eyes blinked, but he kept on trying. Whatever else he was, Roger Storey wasn't a quitter.

But now the stranger meant business. Maybe he had heard, as I had, the sound of horses' hoofs in the dark street outside. Maybe he had been listening for that very sound. Anyway, he measured the kid and drove home a right cross that floored him. Then, he quickly dragged Roger into the back room.

At that moment the doors swung wide and in walked the two gamblers to whom Roger Storey owed the one thousand dollars. Tough looking big men, always on guard. They had their guns strapped around their hips in defiance of a local ordinance which forbid a man to wear his guns in a public drinking place.

They glanced around the room. Bill came out of the back room, shutting the door behind him. For a moment he looked at the gamblers and then sat down. The big fist fight was over. Roger Storey had been soundly beaten, and now lay unconscious in the back room. But now there was a new and worse kind of tension in the Gold Nugget.

One of the gamblers, a heavy-set Mexican with a ragged mustache and a scar over one eye, called for whisky. He said to Carl: "Eh, you seen Roger Storey around?"

Carl didn't get a chance to answer because the stranger spoke first. "I've undertaken to represent Roger Storey. What can I do for you?"

The two gamblers looked at each other and then at the stranger. I didn't like the scowls on their mean faces.

[*Turn page*]

From fabulous DEADWOOD of the West

This is the legendary "Gambler" shirt—now available direct to you from historic Deadwood, South Dakota—home of famous "Wild Bill" Hickock. It's a luxurious washable rayon gabardine, tailored to form-fitting smartness with traditional broad western shoulders.

Note the authentic western lapel pockets and the rich pearl snap buttons. Give yourself this gift or give it to a friend. Choose your favorite desert color. Money back if not completely satisfied. Let's GO, podner! YIPPEE-E!

For Men $5.95 **Similar Shirt for Boys $3.95**

Use this order blank. Shirt mailed C.O.D. or you can save postage by sending check or money order. Circle the color, neck size, and sleeve length you want.

Ridin' high in Western Style!

Colors:	Forest Green, Desert Tan, Twilight Grey, Teal, Maroon, and Lime						
Neck:	14	14½	15	15½	16	16½	17
Sleeve Length:	Short.		Medium.		Long		
Boys' Sizes:	Age 6	8	10	12	14	16	

Name_____

Address_____

City_____ State_____

DEADWOOD OUTFITTERS

Deadwood, South Dakota, Dept. TFG-11

Free Book

MOUNT BIRDS, ANIMALS, FISH

MAIL Postal Today

Yes, FREE. Explains Taxidermy. Tells how to learn at home by mail to mount birds, animals, heads . . . to TAN skins and furs. Great for MEN and BOYS. Fun! Also earn money in spare time. WRITE TODAY—NOW—for free book containing 100 game pictures. State AGE.

N.W. School of Taxidermy, Dept. 4411, Omaha, Neb.

ACCOUNTANT

BECOME AN EXPERT

Executive Accountants and C. P. A's earn $4,000 to $14,000 a year. Thousands of firms need them. We train you thoroly at home in spare time for C. P. A's examinations or executive accounting positions. Previous experience unnecessary. Personal training under supervision of staff of C. P. A's. Placement counsel and help. Write for free book, "Accountancy, the Profession That Pays."

LASALLE Extension University, 417 So. Dearborn St.
A Correspondence Institution Dept. 11329H Chicago 5, Ill.

"YOU ARE UNDER ARREST!"

There's a Thrill in Bringing a Crook to Justice Through Scientific

CRIME DETECTION!

We have taught thousands this exciting, profitable, pleasant profession. Let us teach you, too, in your own home. Learn Finger Printing, Fire Arms Identification, Police Photography and Criminal Investigation thoroughly, quickly and at small cost.

Be A FINGER PRINT Expert

Over 800 of All American Bureaus of Identification employ students or graduates of I. A. S. You, too, can fit yourself to fill a responsible crime detection job with good pay and steady employment. But don't delay—get the details now. Let us show you how easily and completely we can prepare you for this fascinating work, during spare time, in your own home. You may pay as you learn. Write today . . . Now . . . Be sure to state age.

FREE!!! Send for Thrilling "BLUE BOOK OF CRIME"

INSTITUTE OF APPLIED SCIENCE

1920 Sunnyside Ave., Dept. 7968, Chicago 40, Ill.

Find HIDDEN TREASURES

GEIGER COUNTERS for Uranium Detection (see at left). TREASURE DETECTORS for gold, silver, etc. Light-weight, ultra sensitive. None finer at ANY PRICE. New Models available.

INFORMATION FREE

Detectron CO. Dept. 27

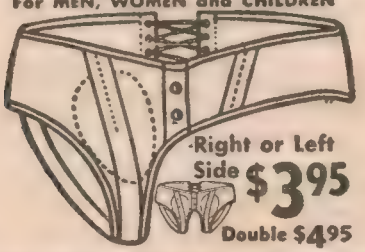
5631 Cahuenga, No. Hollywood, Calif.

AMAZING COMFORT — NO SPECIAL FITTING

RUPTURE-EASER

Reg. in U.S. Pat. Off. (A Piper Brace Product)

For MEN, WOMEN and CHILDREN



Right or Left Side $3.95

Double $4.95

A strong, form fitting washable support. Back lacing adjustable. Snaps up in front. Adjustable leg strap. Soft, flat groin pad. No steel or leather bands. Unexcelled for comfort. Also used as after operation support. Mail orders give measure around the lowest part of the abdomen and state right or left side or double. We Prepay Postage Except on C.O.D.'s.

Over 400,000 Satisfied Users! 10 Day Trial Offer

Money-back guarantee if you don't get blessed relief

Delay may be serious — ORDER TODAY!

PIPER BRACE CO.

811 Wyandotte Dept. TF-112 Kansas City 6, Mo.

Free for Asthma

If you suffer with attacks of Asthma and choke and gasp for breath, if restful sleep is difficult because of the struggle to breathe, don't fail to send at once to the Frontier Asthma Company for a FREE trial of the FRONTIER ASTHMA MEDICINE, a preparation for temporary symptomatic relief of paroxysms of Bronchial Asthma. No matter where you live or whether you have faith in any medicine under the sun, send today for this free trial. It will cost you nothing.

FRONTIER ASTHMA CO. 164-T FRONTIER BLDG.

462 NIAGARA ST. BUFFALO 1, N. Y.

"Who might you be?" demanded the Mexican.

"The name wouldn't mean anything to you," Bill declared. "I think you've got an I.O.U. signed by Roger Storey. How much is it for?"

"One thousand dollars!"

The stranger pulled a roll of bills from his pocket and counted off one thousand dollars. He laid it on the table where it made a right handsome pile. "I've heard," he said, "that your way of winning this bundle was open to suspicion, but since I wasn't present to watch the game, I'm paying off without protest. But here's some advice—or, maybe I should call it a warning: don't ever play another game with young Roger Storey. Because if you do and I hear about it, you're apt to find yourselves in a heap of trouble."

You could feel the tension mount. There he stood, this plain looking stranger, facing two of the toughest hombres ever to walk into the Gold Nugget. And what happened after that challenge of his was inevitable.

The Mexican took off his guns and laid them on the table. "Come outside, you," he said to Bill. That's all he said, but his meaning was clear.

They went outside. The money lay on the table and not a man in the room moved. We could hear the sound of heavy boots scuffing the ground and the thud of fist against flesh as the two men battled in the darkness of the night. We heard a number of groans and grunts and then—silence! The doors swung wide and through them walked the stranger.

Aside from being a mite dusty, there wasn't a mark of battle on him. He faced the other gambler. "I suppose you're eager to try your hand!" he said calmly. I noticed that he had edged close to the guns on the bar, in case the gambler took a fancy to turn it into a shooting affair.

But the fellow didn't have any such idea. He just blinked his eyes, slapped Roger Storey's I.O.U. on the bar and vamoosed out of the Gold Nugget, leaving the money on the table.

I think he wanted to forget that money.

I think he wanted to get out of there and forget the whole thing.

Carl, shaky and blinking, put the shooting-irons under the bar. Then we heard a noise at the door to the back room, and turned to see Roger Storey standing there. The boy had seen the whole row, and was wide-eyed with astonishment. With something else, too. The way he looked at the stranger made me realize that the kid wasn't carrying a grudge because of his beating.

He had found himself a fighting man he could look up to—a hero. Maybe that was what he had needed all along. He shook himself out of his trance and limped into the room.

I could see that he was sore in every bone and muscle.

THE STRANGER smiled, handed Roger an envelope and said: "This is the letter you wrote to your pa. I took the liberty of making sure it wasn't delivered. Keep it as a reminder of the kind of letter you should never write again. Ride on home now. Tell your pa that the debt is paid." He held out his right hand, the same hand which, just a short while before, had knocked Roger kicking; the hand that had pounded sense into the wild youngster. "Shake, son?"

Roger Storey looked around the room sheepishly. He must have felt like crawling into a hole and pulling the hole in after him. If there hadn't been a spark of good in him, no doubt that's just what he would have tried to do. But I remembered what the stranger had said about Roger, after the boy had refused to sell his horse:

"A thing is never all black until you can't see through it!"

So I wasn't surprised when Roger lifted his head high and returned our stares without blinking. I had begun to see through him, the same as the stranger had done.

"Shake?" the kid said. "Why, sure—gladly!"

"And give this thousand dollars to your

[*Turn page*]

FISH-HUNT-WORK
In The Rain With The Amazing New
RAIN-ZIP COVERALL $4.95
With Detachable Parka Hood

Roomy swing action coverall suit of famous Firestone Velon (with Good Housekeeping Seal). Zipper closing, removable parka hood. Folds wet or dry into handy pocket pouch. No stick, peel or odor. Ideal for fishing, hunting, boating, working, etc. Sizes: small, medium, large. Order today. Money back guarantee. Sent C.O.D. $4.95 plus postage or we pay postage if you remit with order.

GARDINER PRODUCTS
18 E. 11th St. Dept. TF-11 Kansas City 6, Mo.

High School Course at Home — **Many Finish in 2 Years**

Go as rapidly as your time and abilities permit. Course equivalent to resident school work — prepares for college entrance exams. Standard H. S. texts supplied. Diploma. Credit for H. S. subjects already completed. Single subjects if desired. High school education is very important for advancement in business and industry and socially. Don't be handicapped all your life. Be a High School graduate. Start your training now. Free Bulletin on request. No obligation.

AMERICAN SCHOOL, Dept. H-958, Drexel at 58th, Chicago 37

EAR ACHE?

DENT'S
EAR WAX DROPS for fast temporary relief of accumulated wax condition
• **TOOTHACHE?** ask your druggist for DENT'S TOOTH GUM, TOOTH DROPS or POULTICE

Learn Profitable Profession in 90 days at Home

MEN AND WOMEN, 18 TO 60. Swedish Massage graduates make big money working full or spare time with doctors or in hospitals, health resorts, sanatoriums, clubs, private practice. A dignified interesting career! Qualify for your graduation certificate. Thorough instruction at home as in class rooms. Write for Illustrated Book—FREE!

The College of Swedish Massage
Dept. 263-P, 41 E. Pearson, Chicago 11

When You Visit Your Favorite Newsstand, Look for the Slogan

A THRILLING PUBLICATION

ON THE COVERS OF THE MAGAZINES YOU BUY!

LAW

STUDY AT HOME for Business Success and LARGER PERSONAL EARNINGS. Over 40 years expert instruction—over 114,000 students enrolled. LL.B. Degree awarded. All text material furnished. Easy payment plan. Send for FREE BOOK.

AMERICAN EXTENSION SCHOOL OF LAW
Dept. T-56 646 N. Michigan Avenue, Chicago 11, Illinois

MAKE all the MONEY YOU WANT—FAST!

Make up to $4.00 a pair selling exclusive Cushion Shoes
New 3-Sole style sensation! 2 Full Leather soles, hand hammered tap sole, heel-to-toe cushion, arch support. Fast sellers in dress, work, sport shoes. ONLY Cushioned Paratroop Boot. Big spare time income. No experience or investment needed. Samples to producers. Write NOW for FREE Outfit.

FREE OUTFIT PARAGON SHOE CO., 746 Columbus Ave., Boston, Mass.

FREE—Amazing Book on
RHEUMATISM, ARTHRITIS

If you suffer the aches, pains and discomforts of Rheumatism, as manifested in ARTHRITIS, NEURITIS, SCIATICA or LUMBAGO, send today for the FREE Book. It reveals important facts about why drugs and medicine give only temporary relief without removing causes. Explains fully a proven, specialized system of treatment that may save you years of distress. No obligation. Write for this FREE Book today!
BALL CLINIC, Dept. 504, Excelsior Springs, Mo.

INVENTORS

Learn how to protect your invention. Specially prepared "Patent Guide" containing detailed information concerning patent protection and procedure with "Record of Invention" form will be forwarded to you upon request—without obligation.
CLARENCE A. O'BRIEN & HARVEY JACOBSON
Registered Patent Attorneys
28-K District National Bldg. Washington 5, D. C.

Here's the REAL lowdown!

Corruption and vice in Washington's after-dark bottle clubs. Read it in REAL!

Baseball's sharp-tongued bench jockeys, exposed in REAL's exciting first issue!

Stolen-gun peddlers—the gangsters' best friends. REAL tells where killers get guns!

96 pages of exciting stories, adventures, and war epics, packed with pictures FOR MEN!

NOW AT YOUR NEWSSTAND

REAL the exciting magazine FOR MEN

pa," Bill said. "It rightfully belongs to him."

"But you said he never got my letter!"

"When you give him the money, tell him it's from Bill Ransom—he'll understand."

ROGER stared at the stranger. "Bill Ransom?" he said. "Seems to me I've heard that name before."

"Your pa and I used to be partners, Roger. We might have been partners now, but I had some queer ideas in those days and I pulled a fast deal and skipped, thinking money meant more than friendship. That was a long time ago. Your ma was alive then. It's taken all this time for me to swallow my pride and come back here with the money I stole."

Bill placed the money in Roger's hand and started for the door. Now I knew why Bill hadn't wanted to meet Jeff Storey after finding out how wealthy Storey was. Bill had come to town to pay off an old debt, but handing a man money when he already has more than he can use—well, that isn't paying off a debt.

So Bill had paid the debt another way. A better way. I may be short-sighted about a lot of things, but I could figure that out.

I was right, too. Because Bill Ransom stopped at the door, turned and said with a soft grin: "You behave yourself, Roger. I'll have my ear to the ground and if I hear of you cutting up, why I'll just naturally have to ride back here and tan your hide. When I pay a debt, it has to stay paid.

"But, shucks," he added, a warm smile on his face, "I know that I can count on you."

FREE GUN BOOK

Through the courtesy of O. F. Mossberg & Sons, Inc., sporting firearms manufacturers, we are able to offer our readers, free of charge, the 46-page illustrated book, "The Guidebook to Rifle Marksmanship," prepared by the Nat'l Rifle Ass'n. Please address your request to O. F. Mossberg & Sons, Inc., Dept. A, New Haven 5, Conn.

NO MONEY DOWN!

Order Any Item on this Page

ON CREDIT!

Send No Money! No Down Payment required. If you're a reliable person, YOUR CREDIT IS GOOD WITH US. Make small monthly payments *after* you see your selection.

10 DAYS FREE EXAMINATION

Easy Monthly Payments

Mail coupon below today with your selection. Examine it in your home for 10 days. Then, either pay in monthly installments or return selection to us.

All Prices Include Federal Tax.

17 JEWELS

K312 **29.75**

SELF-WINDING · WATER AND SHOCK-RESISTANT

Winds Itself.

Water-Resist

Shock-Resist

Sweep-Second • Anti-Magnetic Steel Back • Radium Dial Dustproof Case • Expansion Band

NO MONEY DOWN.

Pay Only $3 a Month.

29.75

P308

A Glorious Gift for HER

3-PIECE RHINESTONE SET

17 Jewel Rhinestone Watch, matching Rhinestone Necklace and Earrings in a completely matched Ensemble. Finished in gleaming Rhodium. Sensational low price! *NO MONEY DOWN.* Pay Only $3 a Month.

BULOVA WATCHES

R212 **39.75**

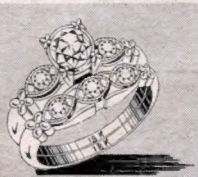
Bulova "Miss Universe." 17 Jewels. Yellow rolled Gold plate case. Expansion band. *NO MONEY DOWN.* Pay Only $4 a Month.

M206 **39.75**

Bulova "Byron." 15 Jewels. Yellow rolled Gold plate case. Expansion band. *NO MONEY DOWN.* Pay only $4 a Month.

F24 **17.50**

2 Carat genuine Zircon. Diamond-like brilliance. 14K yellow Gold. NO MONEY DOWN. Pay only $2 a Month.



A104/C53 **59.50**

6 Diamond Bridal Set with exclusive lock feature. 14K yellow or 18K white Gold. NO MONEY DOWN. Pay only 5.95 a Month.

D153 **49.50**

Man's Twin Ring. 2 Diamonds, pear-shaped simulated Ruby. Set in 14K yellow Gold. NO MONEY DOWN. Pay only 4.95 a Month.

L. W. Sweet

Founded in 1878

MAIL ORDER DIVISION, FINLAY STRAUS, INC.
25 W. 14th St., NEW YORK 11, N. Y. Dept. TF 1152

L. W. Sweet, Dept. TF 1152
25 W. 14th St., New York 11, N. Y.

Send me No._____ Price $_____. Unless I return my selection to you in 10 days, I agree to pay $_____ per month until full price is paid.

My Name_____

Address_____

City_____ State_____

Age_____ Occupation_____

YOU GET THIS

AMAZING PREMIUM

YES! IT'S TRUE! You get all SEVEN of these brand new books for only a dollar... if you join the Mystery Guild. (Worth $18.75 in publishers' editions.)

EACH INDIVIDUALLY BOUND HARD COVER FULL-SIZED NEW BOOKS!

TRIPLE JEOPARDY
by REX STOUT
"I killed that cop!" said the scandal-hungry brunette. Was she lying...crazy...or telling the TRUTH?

DEAD AS A DINOSAUR
by FRANCES & RICHARD LOCKRIDGE
Can you figure this one out? Someone keeps sending PONIES...MIDGETS... even FREAKS to old Prof. Preson! A practical joker? Then why did he KILL the professor?

THE KING IS DEAD
by ELLERY QUEEN
Somebody killed sadistic Mr. Bendigo. But the murder weapon was an EMPTY gun! And it was "fired" through a solid steel door!

THE NIGHT WATCH
by THOMAS WALSH
Every night, he trained his big binoculars on the "bachelor girl" in apartment 8-A. He got a "close-up" of her private life. Then the KILLER showed up...

BEHIND THE CRIMSON BLIND
by CARTER DICKSON
A fortune in diamonds... and a questionable blonde ...put Sir Henry Merrivale on the trail of a FANTASTIC CRIMINAL!

THE MAN WHO DIED TWICE
by GEORGE HARMON COXE
A dying man says: "When my uncle saw me last, I was a child. Go to him..and say you're ME!" A terrific thriller.

THE SECOND SAINT OMNIBUS
by LESLIE CHARTERIS
Contains three full-length novelettes featuring the "Saint"—plus seven other adventures!

ALL 7 NEW MYSTERY "HITS" YOURS for only $1.00 WITH MEMBERSHIP

An amazing introductory offer that may never be made again

WILL YOU ACCEPT the gigantic PREMIUM pictured above? Just look what you get: All SEVEN of these full-sized, NEW best-sellers by world-famous mystery writers—to read, to enjoy, to put proudly on your bookshelf! The price of these books in publishers' editions adds up to $18.75. But YOU get the entire bargain package for only ONE DOLLAR with membership! This amazing offer may never be made again. Mail the coupon now.

Dollar Mystery Guild Membership Gives You the Relaxation You Deserve

Here's the simple, popular plan of the Dollar Mystery Guild: Each month the club selects two top-notch new books. These are described to members well IN ADVANCE. You take only those you like; no more than four a year if you wish. If you don't want a book, simply tell the club. It will not be sent. Members save money by paying only ONE DOLLAR each (plus few cents for shipping) for large, hard-bound books, worth up to $3.00 each in publisher's editions!

Best of all, if you join NOW, you get SEVEN new books for ONE DOLLAR as an enrollments premium! Send coupon to DOLLAR MYSTERY GUILD, GARDEN CITY, N. Y.

Mail This Coupon to:

THE DOLLAR MYSTERY GUILD, DEPT. TFG-11, Garden City, N. Y.

Please enroll me in the Dollar Mystery Guild and rush me these new books. Later, I'll send only $1.00 for the entire package.

ENROLLMENT BONUS—7 for $1.00
THE NIGHT WATCH * TRIPLE JEOPARDY * DEAD AS A DINOSAUR
THE KING IS DEAD * BEHIND THE CRIMSON BLIND
THE MAN WHO DIED TWICE * THE SECOND SAINT OMNIBUS

Forthcoming book bargains will be described to me in advance in the club's monthly bulletin, "Mystery Guild Clues". It is my privilege to notify you whenever I do not wish to accept any forthcoming selections at the special membership price of only $1.00 each, plus a few cents shipping charge. The purchase of books is entirely voluntary on my part. I do not have to accept a book every month—only four during each year that I remain a member. I may resign at any time after accepting four selections. **NO-RISK GUARANTEE: If not delighted, I can return books in 7 days and cancel membership.**

Name (PLEASE PRINT) .....

Street and No. .....

City ..... Zone ..... State .....

(Same offer in Canada. Address 105 Bond Street, Toronto 2, Canada. Offer good in U. S. A. and Canada only.)